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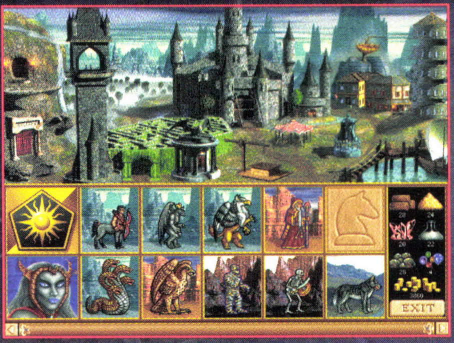

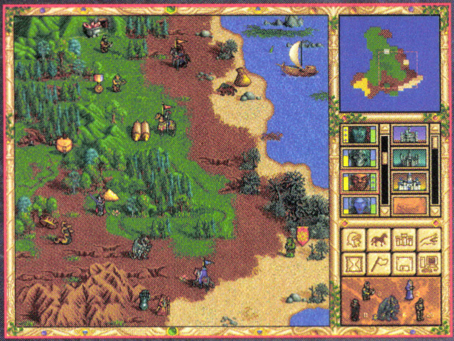

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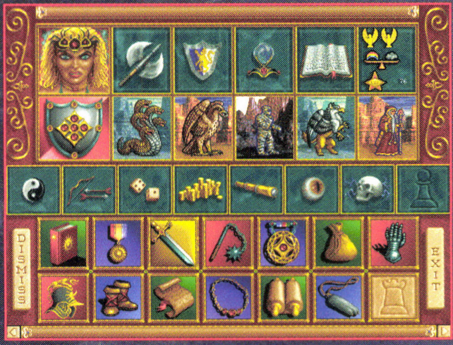

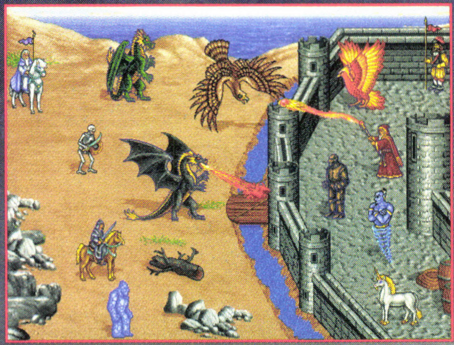

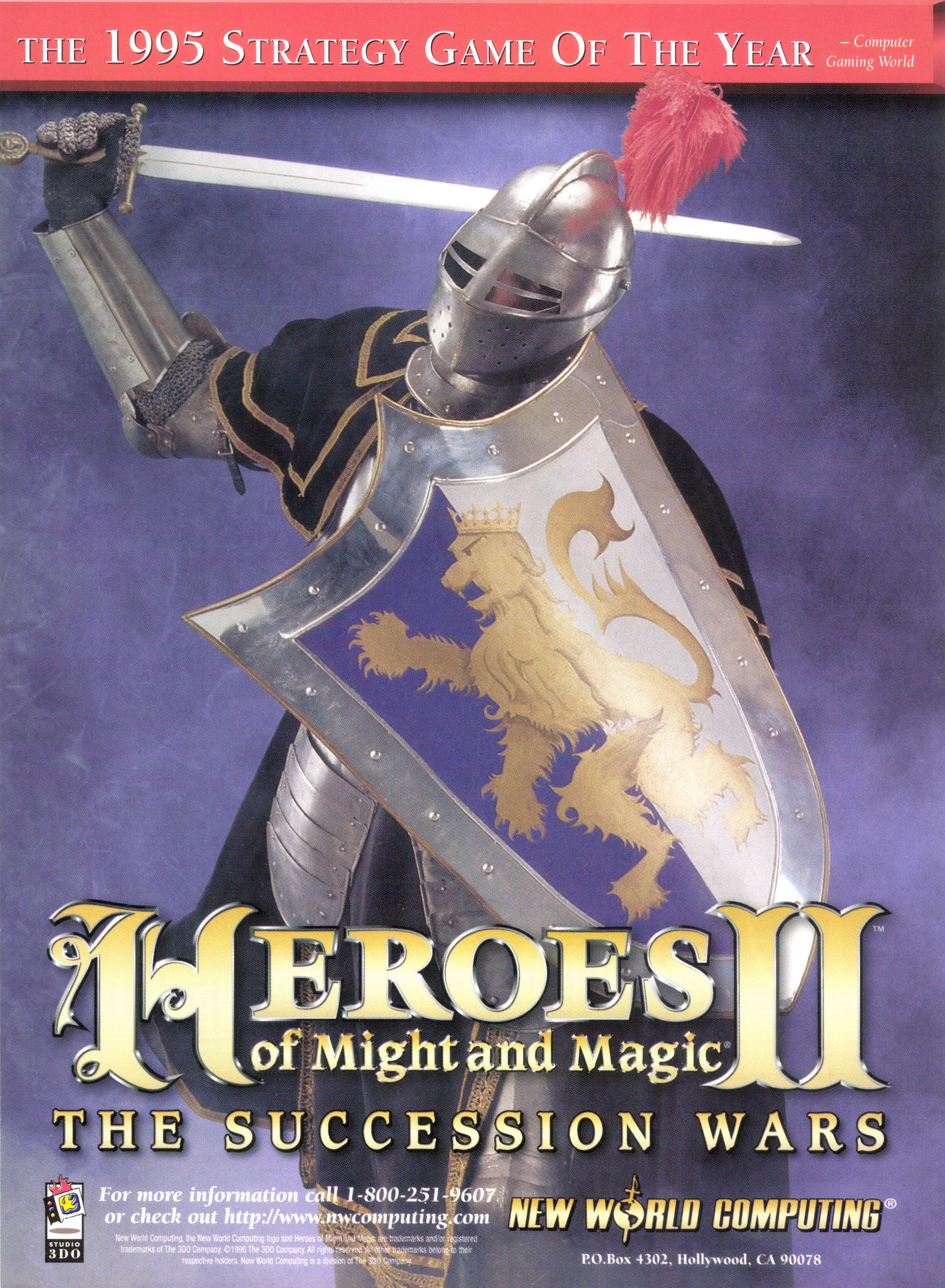
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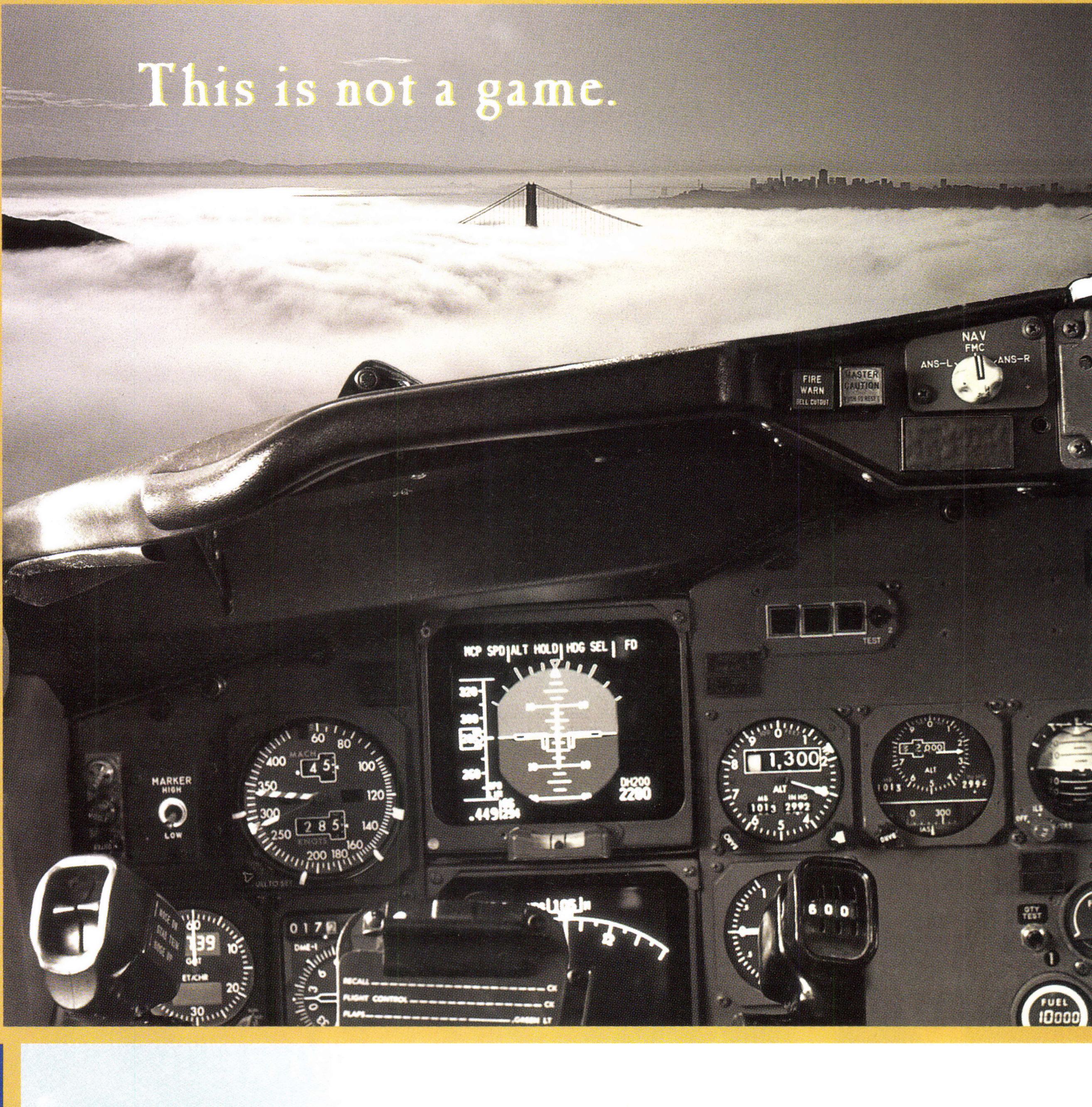

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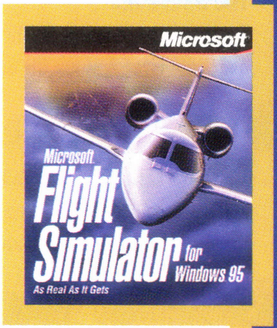

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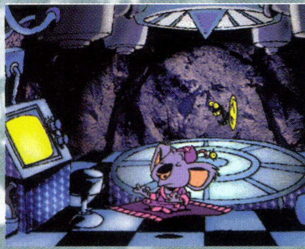

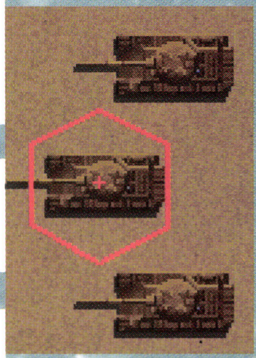

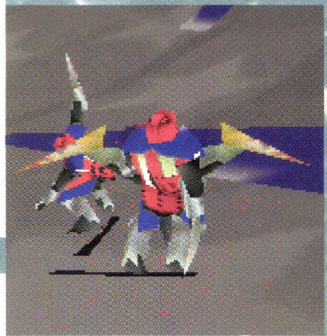

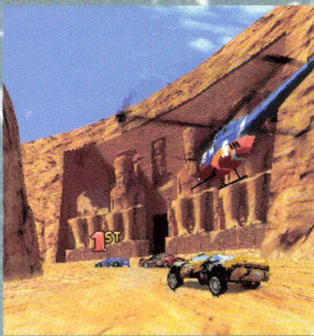

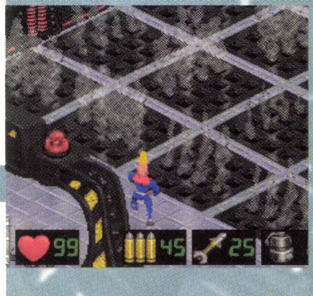

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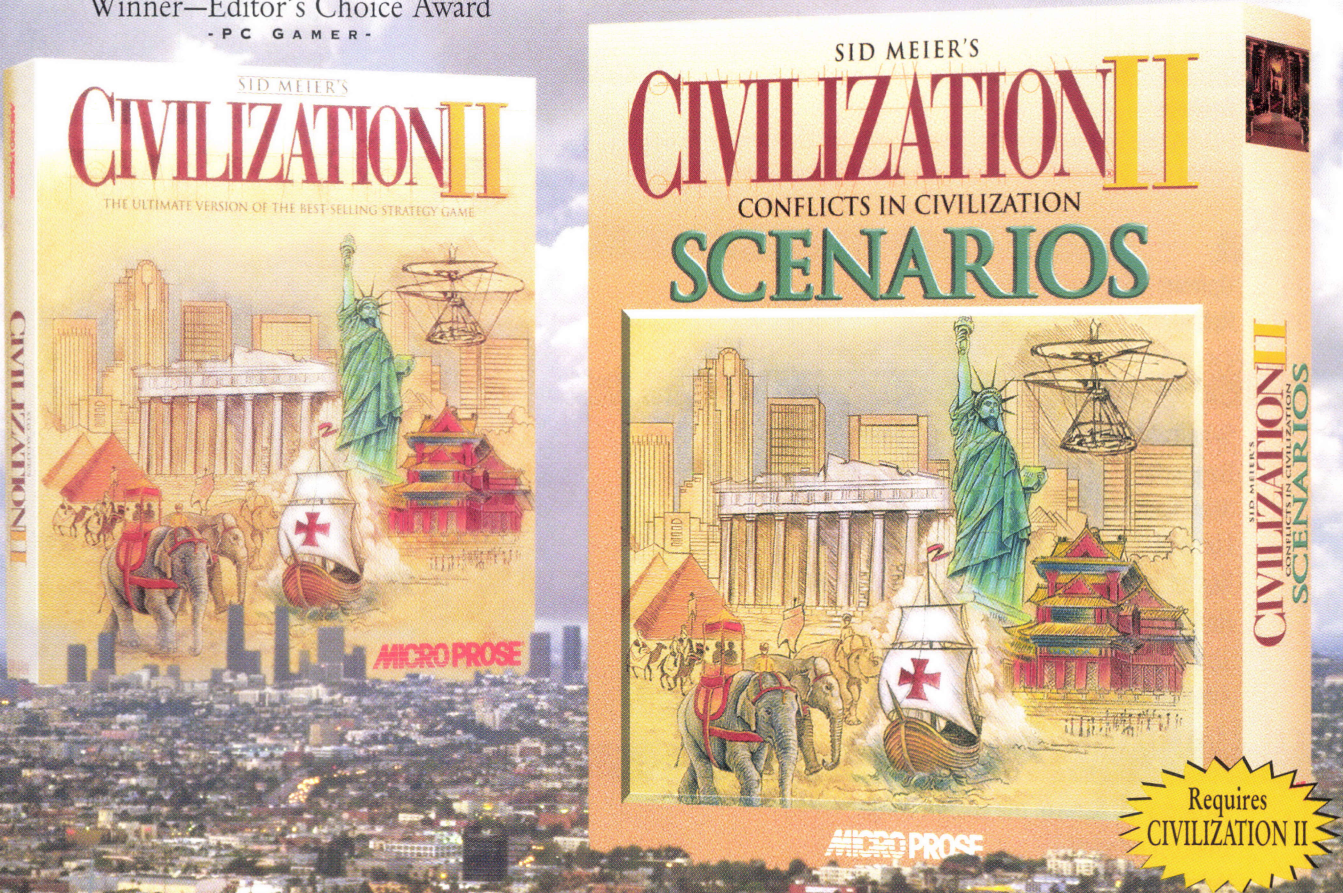
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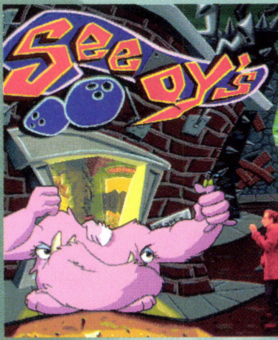

EA SPORTS
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review ratings

Classic	★★★★★
Excellent	★★★★☆
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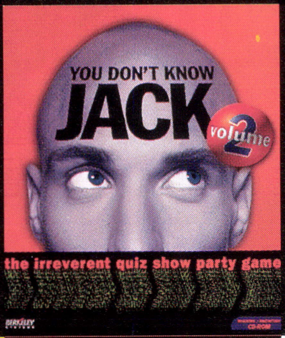
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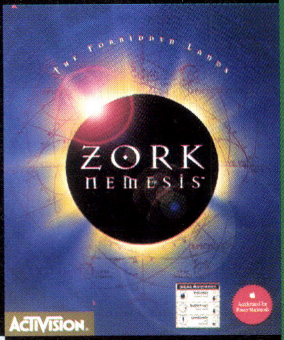
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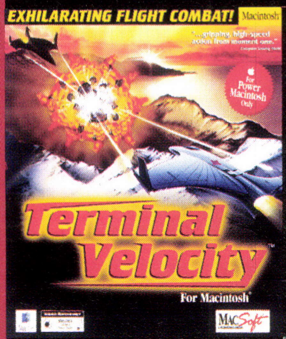
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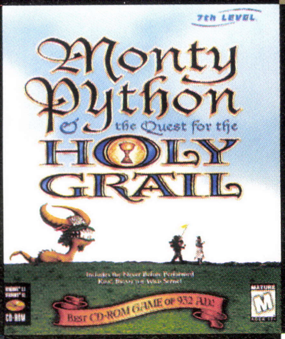
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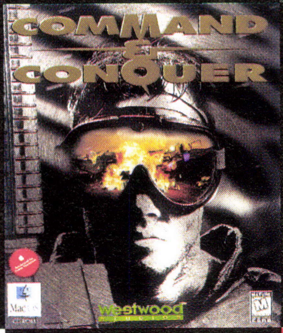
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Potpourri 2

Death, French bread and timeliness

Lots of different little issues on the table this month. Let's get started with one which has been on my mind lately. When, oh when, are we going to get a little more beyond the shoot-kill-burn metaphor in computer gaming? I have as much fun with this as anyone, so it's not a moral issue for me; but – and I *hope* most people playing computer games recognize this – there's more to life. If there's more to life, there should be more to a computer game, yes? I'm not asking for more *realism* per se, here, just a little more real adventure, romance, discovery of brave new worlds, tragedy, real comedy in the classic sense (where's computer gaming's *Philadelphia Story*?), epic.. you know, the usual round of stuff we humans consider entertaining?

The voices from the peanut gallery usually reply to this moan, "play more adventures, dude!" – and I would, except that the *Myst* metaphor seems to have overwhelmed adventure game design recently the way the *Doom* metaphor has overwhelmed action game design. Again, I have nothing against *Myst*, unlike some gamers; but if I want an Art Gallery of the Weird, I can always go to the Museum of Contemporary Art somewhere. I respect and enjoy the visual arts work being done in this kind of game, and purely at that level, there are a bunch of really great art tours parading out there now as adventure games. But experiencing them isn't exactly adventurous. Oh well.

Role-playing games continue to be moribund in conception. Some solid titles have released recently, but the formulae are as stale as year-old French bread. Role-playing should be precisely that, playing a role. If life were like the average role-playing game, there'd be approximately 10,000 people left alive on planet Earth, and they'd all be spending most of their time perfecting their weapons skills. C'mon, guys!

Okay, I'll leave the rest of that thought for completion another time. On to another issue. Do you folks want it fast, want it first, want it as Holy Writ From the Eternal Gamer Who Won't Say a Word until the last byte has been wrung dry (three months after the game has shipped), or what? We get very mixed signals here. Personally, I've never found reviews based on having absolutely finished a game in any way superior to those written by people with experience who've dug far enough in to get a good, solid sense of whether a title's a hit or not. You *know* that if a game's good in the first five minutes, and shows the kind of attention to detail you wish for day in and day out as an experienced gamer *during* those five minutes, chances are pretty good the game is solid. Similarly, if a game's reaching for over-ambitious goals, has play or interface mechanics which feel half-conceived, if the resources to finish the game properly weren't there, you know that, too, after a brief encounter with a game. More time spent with a game is valuable (*we* value it here, at least) because it means a solid check on whether everyone kept with the project all the way to completion or not. That's its main benefit. Whether it's *necessary* is another question.

On the other side, doing an official review from unfinished software (no, we do *not* do that, though we will cover such in other ways, see this month's new section *The Beta Zone* on page XX) strikes me as irresponsible. At worst, it will annoy a publisher enough (unless you rave about all such unfinished software) that you'll guarantee no early looks for *your* publication, thank you, ever again (or at least for a few months). At best, you'll risk losing your credibility with your readers if you keep missing the mark and over-praising shoddy work, or write a glowing review on a concept which never sees the light of day in the final product.

In the final analysis, though, gamers seem to want information at the earliest opportunity; and they want as much of it as they can get. This includes opinion on upcoming software, as well as simple information on same. We have to address this need, that's clear.

I don't consider it irresponsible to offer *projections* on whether we, as experienced gamers, analysts, writers think an ongoing project has merit, looks likely to be seen through to completion, is too haphazard to succeed, etc. Software publishers might cringe at the thought of an unfinished project getting early negative attention, and refuse to release info on same because of such fears; but wouldn't they also want a considered outside opinion before investing any more time and energy in same? On the other side, what harm could positive early info on a game do, if handled carefully?

In any event, I'm curious what all of you have to say on this matter. If you're a gamer especially, or a game designer, a publisher, a PR person, a producer – write in and let us know your thoughts. We're certainly not the only ones trying to think through these issues, but we'd love to be the ones to have a forum on this important issue in the industry. *–Steve Wartofsky, Editor*

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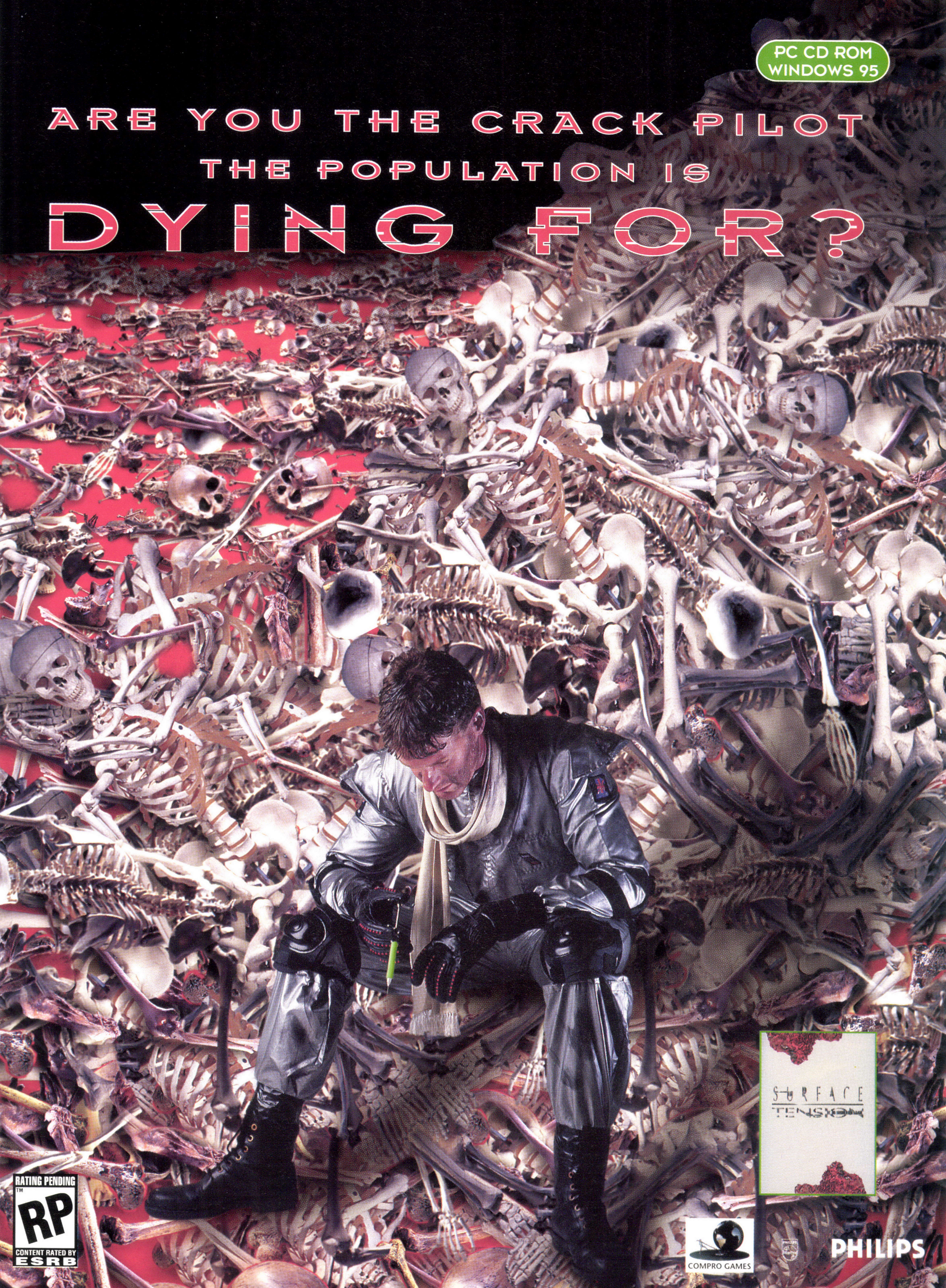
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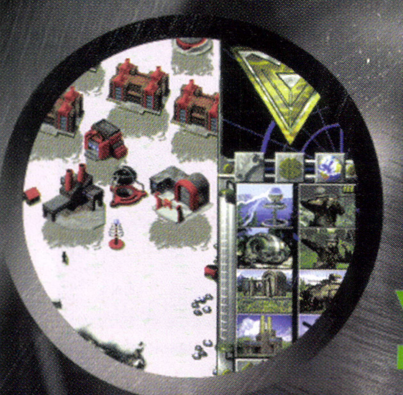

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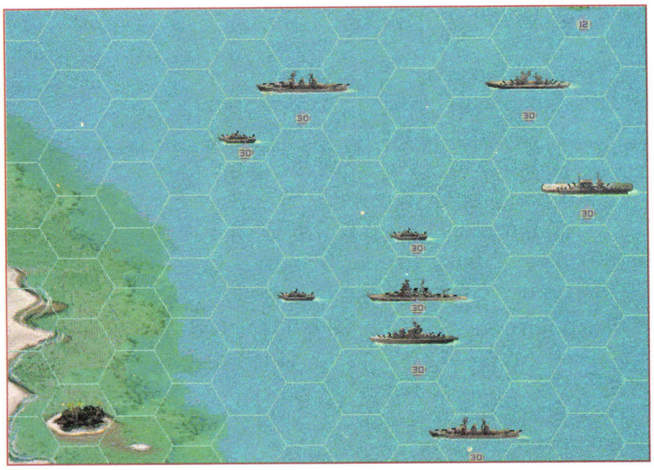
SSI's strategy for a new year

The battle plan for 1997 calls for more Generals and a strategic return to Aden

1996 has been another big year for SSI. We've seen the release of long-awaited titles (*Silent Hunter*, *Age of Rifles*), the continuation of several game series (*Fantasy General*, *Steel Panthers II: Modern Battles*, *Great Naval Battles IV*), and the release of a "surprise" product (*War Wind*). While gamers are still absorbing the play value available in all those titles, many are already beginning to wonder, what's next? What could be coming from one of the oldest publishers in the business? With a multi-faceted company like SSI, known for wargames, role playing games, and now simulations and strategy games, what directions could they be taking this year? There have been rumors, but no hard information… at least, not until late October, when SSI stopped by our offices, unrolled their maps, and gave us a look at their release battle plan for 1997. While the first half of the year will be pretty quiet (mostly add-ons and special combo deals), SSI's gaming front will really heat up from late Spring through the end of '97.



Pacific General: **American ships positioned to support an island landing. Note the different water colors near the island; they indicate increasing shallowness and limit how close the larger ships can approach an island**

Imperialism

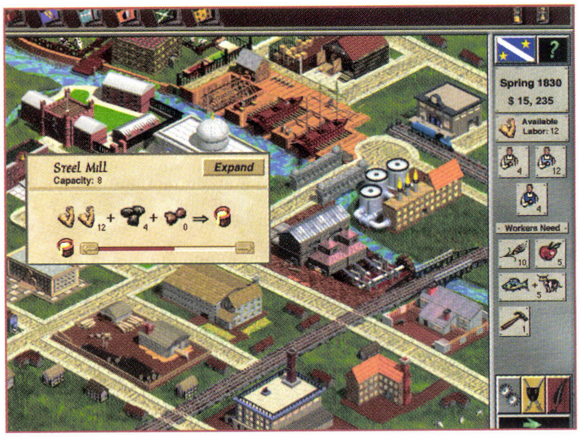
The first title due out is coming from the San Francisco developer Frog City (they've been in the business of game conversions for a while, but this is their first original title). *Imperialism* is a *Civilization*-style game set in the 19th century. Your goal is to steer one of seven major nations through the dangerous economic, diplomatic, and military waters that were the 1800s, building it up from the early Industrial Revolution through post-World War I levels of technology and economy (SSI is considering expanding the growth-range into the modern and future eras). While the situations are historically realistic, the nations and even maps will be randomized to increase replayability (although there will of course be a scenario based on real Earth maps and countries). There will be full, dynamic economic and resource models, complete enough that you can win the game through economic domination if you wish. Of course, military conquest isn't ignored; while strategically you'll move your units–from foot infantry, grenadiers, and cavalry on up through early tanks and bi-planes–by region (here it seems conceptually similar to the great old SSI game *Colonial Conquest*), there will be an optional simple tactical module in the spirit of *Conquest of the New World* for those who like to fight their battles personally. SSI promises that the "cabinet members" in the game will really be smart enough to handle those aspects of gameplay you're not interested in –diplomacy, economy, or military–without dragging your nation to oblivion; or, you can handle all the little details personally. Multiplayer options will of course be included, and the game should ship for Mac and Windows 95 on the same CD.

Pacific General

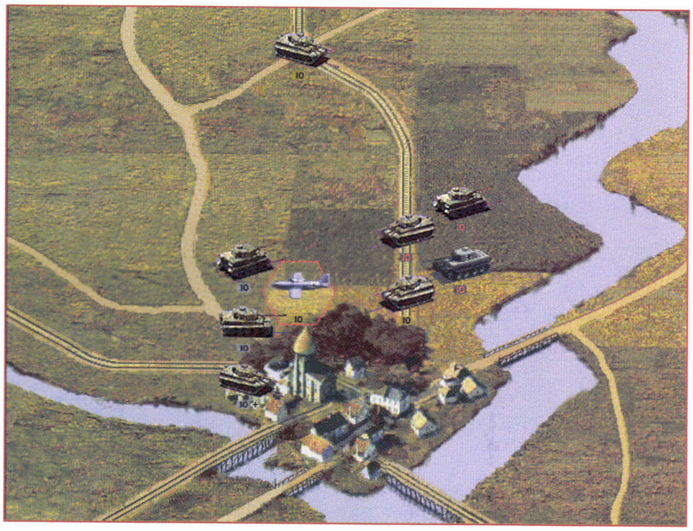
The last in the current generation of the *Five Star Series* which started with the famous *Panzer General*, *Pacific General* will finally bring us to the often ignored Pacific Theater. In a first for the *General* games, you'll be able to play campaigns from either the American or Japanese sides. While the designers have tentatively decided to *not* include nuclear weapons (a controversial subject either way), the choice could lead to more interesting gameplay from the American side, as several new alternate history scenarios (culminating in the invasion of the Home Islands) are now made possible. On the Japanese side success will lead to interesting alternate-history possibilities in India, Madagascar, Africa and, eventually, the invasion of San Francisco. The whole naval combat model will be greatly improved and expanded from the version included in *Panzer General* which, SSI admits, was little more than super-artillery afloat. In a similar fashion, the game scales will not be as vague as they were in *Panzer*, although they will change between the naval actions and the ground warfare. Aircraft carriers which carry up to eight aircraft units (depending on size), submarines operating at different depths, critical hit tables for the different ships (so multiple areas of a ship can take damage, each with different effects on that ship's capabilities), all are features of the new naval model. Land combat will be expanded, with specialty pieces, hidden troops, landing craft, and item slots in units (as in *Fantasy General*) so, say, an infantry unit could be equipped with flame throwers. Lastly, the game will finally ship with a scenario generator, which will let you create your own scenarios based on the maps included in the game (they'll be including the complete map and unit sets from *Panzer General* and *Allied General* as well, so you'll be able to game out conflicts from almost any theater, or try fantasy battles like the Germans versus the Japanese).

Buccaneer and Ship of the Line

While based on the same basic engine, these two games from The Age of Sail promise very different gameplay. Because it will be released initially on the Sony PlayStation (and, hopefully, for Window 95 later on), *Buccaneer* will feature more swashbuckling, more action/adventure; "sort of *Pirates!* meets *Great Naval Battles,*" we were told. Gameplay will take place primarily in the



Imperialism: **conceptually similar to the old SSI classic game Colonial Conquest (preliminary artwork shown)**



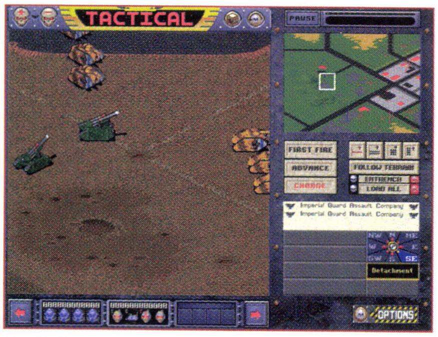
The outstanding new visual look to Panzer General II

Caribbean, as you take "the role of a pirate and scourge the sea." Battle "legitimate" powers as they attempt to bring you to justice, or make secret deals with them to try to justify your actions; interact with characters in ports as you attempt to learn of shipments of gold and other valuables. Hide out in secret bases or deserted islands (can you bury your treasure?), or sally forth with the Jolly Roger flying to capture merchants and fight off military vessels. We don't know yet if you'll get to make people walk the plank.

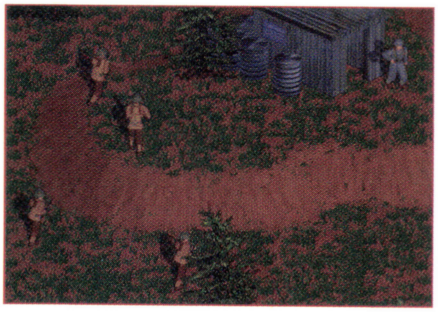
With *Ship of the Line* you'll take command of one of several British naval vessels from the period 1790-1810. This time you'll be sailing for the Crown, performing deeds for the Queen, participating in battles, and perhaps bringing in a little on the side for yourself. The game will be mission based, and while you may take part in some multi-ship engagements like Trafalgar, it isn't a strategy game. You will be in command of your own vessel only. Never fear, however; you'll be plenty busy. A complete 3D sailing model will be included, and it will be up to you to maneuver effectively; even boarding actions may be modeled in detail (through *X-Com*-style gameplay), even though it wasn't a common practice of the British. As with *Buccaneer*, RPG elements will play a part as your missions take you to accurately modeled ports throughout the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Caribbean.

Panzer General II

A tentative title, this game introduces the new engine for the *Five Star Series*. The game uses hand-painted maps and unit representations taken from photographs of the very detailed MicroMinatures models; the visual detail they've gotten even in preliminary tests is amazing and achieved much faster (and at lower cost) than rendered vehicles. The scale is somewhat lower than that in *Panzer General* (although who could tell what the scale ever was in *Panzer General*?), with units now having ranges of four to six hexes. The initiative model is being completely reworked so gamers will be able to better simulate quantity versus quality (Shermans vs. Tiger IIs?). The maps will be more interactive, with craters, smoke, and bridges that can be both destroyed and rebuilt. There will be one large campaign and three smaller ones, and the campaign structure is being reworked so there will be more possibilities for alternate history scenarios (actions in Spain, Turkey, and Sweden are all being considered). New units and units with special capabilities will be included, and a scenario editor is planned as well.



Real-time armored action with Epic Space Marines



Computer Ambush: Use your squad to execute and ambush

Computer Ambush

A working title only, this game is definitely *not* a rework of the classic SSI game by the same name; instead it's more *X-Com* meets World War II combat, Hollywood-style. Being developed by Random Games, the same folks who are developing *Wages of War* for New World Computing, *Ambush* will let you lead an eight man squad through a series of missions starting in North Africa, through Sicily and perhaps Italy, across the beaches at Normandy, and on into Germany. Your squad members will improve, you'll get new equipment, and, depending on the missions, you may get extra forces or meet up with resistance fighters. While the game is really more of a strategy game than a wargame, SSI is working to ensure that weapons effects are accurate. There'll be a mission generator, characterizations with voice-over for team members and the people you interact with on missions (similar to *Jagged Alliance*), and four or eight-person multiplayer (teams for certain, free-for-all a possibility).

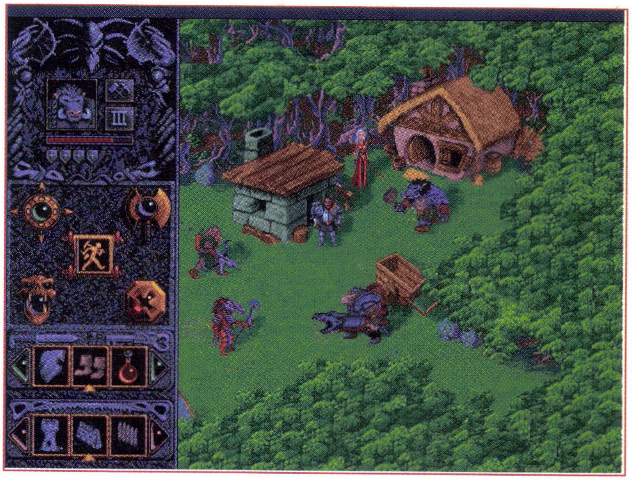
Other projects

Epic Space Marines, "first looked" back in our July '96 issue (#68), is a strategy game featuring the now combined Games Workshop universes of *Warhammer 40K* and *Space Marines*. Battle for control of a planet using the wild unit types from the famous minatures universes.

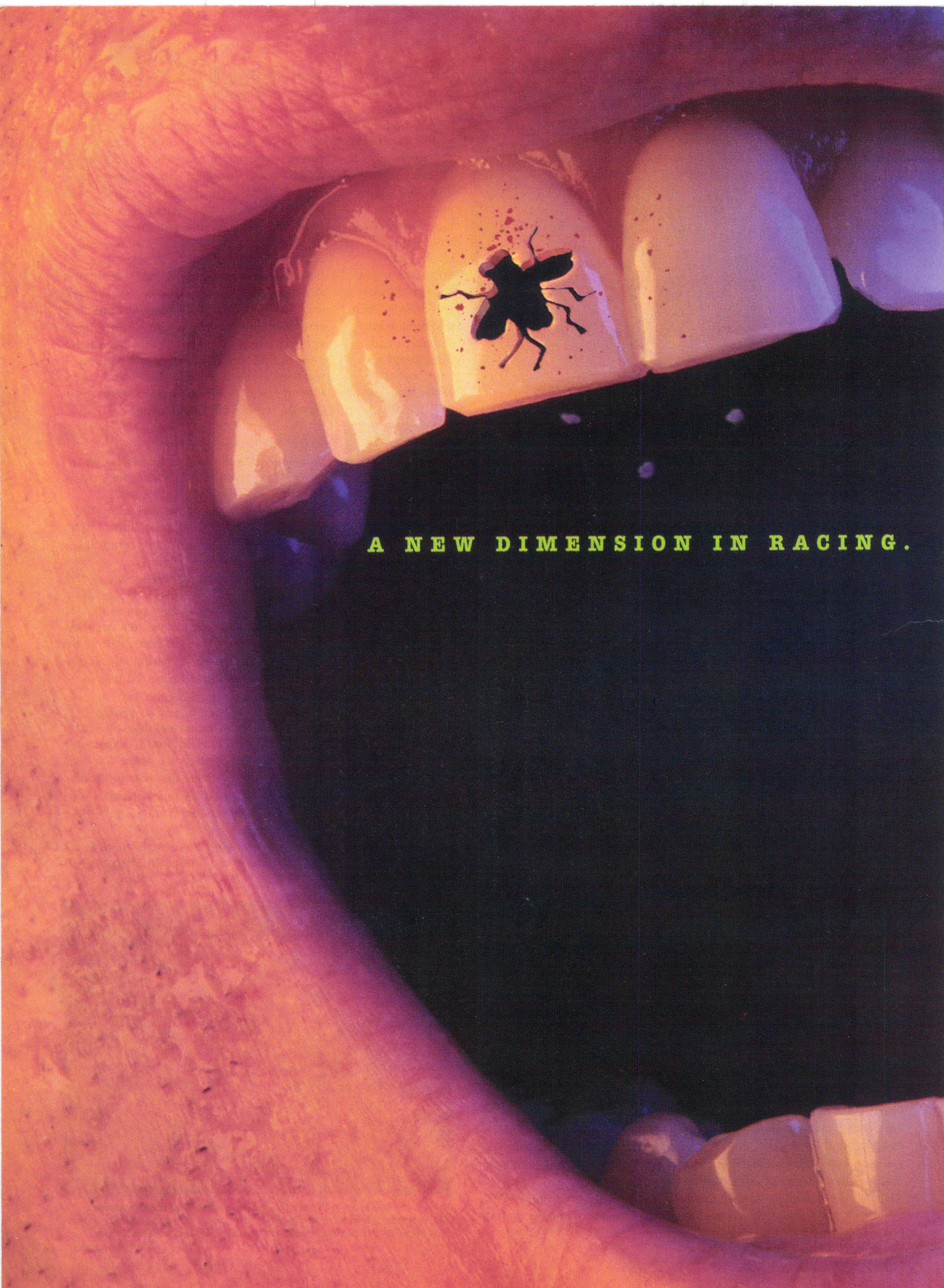
An as-yet-unnamed real-time strategy game set in SSI's *Aden* universe is already well under way. It will feature you as the leader of a small band of loyal yeoman, moving through a variety of missions fighting the forces of darkness; while conceptually similar to *Heroes of Might and Magic*, SSI tells us the gameplay is quite different.

Hard-core wargamers may be treated to a follow-on to *Rifles* tentatively titled *Age of Muskets*, it would cover primarily Napoleonic warfare; also, discussions are under way with Gary Grigsby for a game that may be different from those we've seen him produce before (and that may not be out until '98, if both sides even agree to do it).

Lastly, a *WarWind II* is scheduled, as is a role-playing game from the UK titled *Siege of Stormhaven*. *– Scott Udell*



Real-time strategy in the world of Aden: Note that these graphics show the zoomed in mode (particularly good for combat); a zoomed out view for better command-and-control will also be included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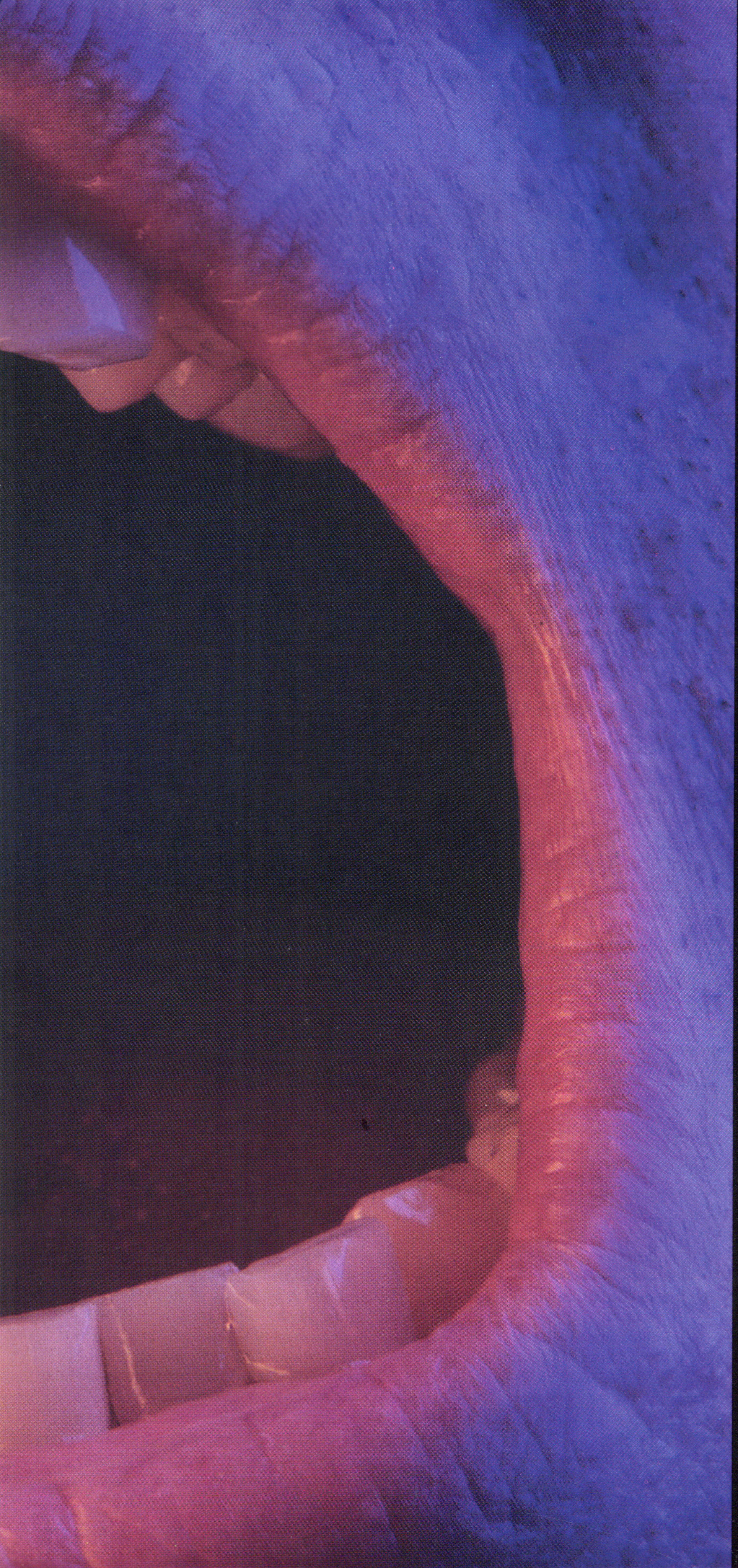

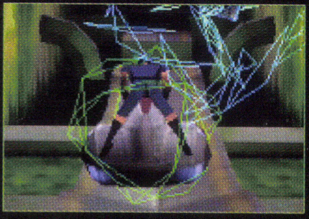

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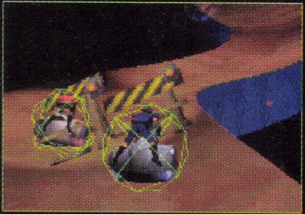

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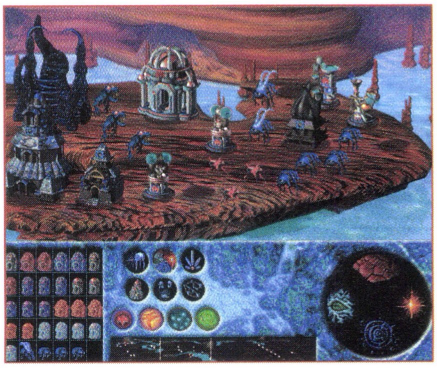
The Tone Rebellion

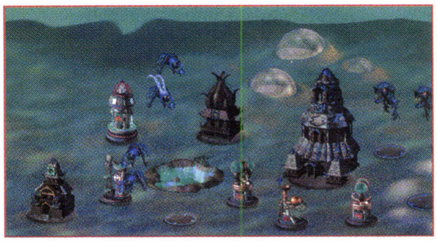
The Logic Factory tries again



The surreal island realms of The Tone Rebellion

The folks at The Logic Factory have announced their first game since the controversial *Ascendancy* (which some reviewers liked because of its unique approach to space strategy and interesting technology, but which many gamers hated for its weak AI opponent). Known as *The Tone Rebellion*, details on the game are still pretty sketchy. As the game starts out, you take control of one of four clans of "floaters," a people split asunder in ages past by the Leviathan, as you battle to reunite the 15 lands created by the Leviathan's destructive acts. These islands form the missions of the game, wherein you must explore the strange world, mine for Tone, and deal with a variety of challenges, always watching out for the Leviathan. Eventually, you'll unite with the other floater clans to "compete in a fierce battle for the last islands."

In addition to building, resource gathering, and fighting The Logic Factory says you'll encounter "puzzles, vaults, ancient ruins and secret doorways," lending what sounds like a touch of adventure or RPGing to this strategy game. *The Tone Rebellion* is due out late first-quarter of 1997 for both Windows 95 and DOS. – *Scott Udell*



Floaters on a foggy day?

Floyd lost in space

What's not news is that Activision had planned a Spring 1997 release of *Planetfall 2: The Other Side of Floyd*, a sequel to Infocom's much beloved text adventure which left tears in the eyes of thousands at the demise of their cybernetic chum. What is news is that the project has been "postponed indefinitely."

The devil in Microsoft

Microsoft has announced that it will be releasing a real-time strategy game code-named *Devil's Own*. Developed by Rebellion Developments Limited of Oxford, England, the game will have you controlling "a large force of robot soldiers in a battleground of the future." In other Microsoft news, despite our report last month that Kali was the way to hook up with their games, Microsoft offers a free matchmaking service for *Monster Truck Madness*, *Close Combat*, *Hellbender* and *Golf 3.0* users. Load the game up and point your browser to the *Internet Gaming Zone* (**zone.msn.com/**) to meet and compete against other gamers.

BRIEFS: We incorrectly reported that preliminary versions of ***Falcon 4.0*** were running on Creative Labs' **PCI Blaster**. MicroProse was actually showing it on cards based on the **3DFx** chipset. In other news, company reps say that ***X-COM: Apocalypse*** is planned for a Spring release, with ***Agents of Justice*** following in the Summer. They've has also entered into an agreement with **TriStar Pictures** to produce games based on the upcoming **Paul Verhoeven** (*RoboCop, Showgirls*) filmed version of Robert Heinlein's ***Starship Troopers***. The first game will be a 3D action game, and with MicroProse having licensed the ***Unreal*** engine from Epic MegaGames, it wouldn't be surprising if that was the basis for the game... **MystHexen?** – Broderbund has hooked up with ***Hexen*** developer **Raven Software** to produce ***Outrage*** a post-apocalyptic 3D action game... **The next Blitzkrieg** – According to SSG, the release date for *The Last Blitzkrieg* has been moved back to March '97...

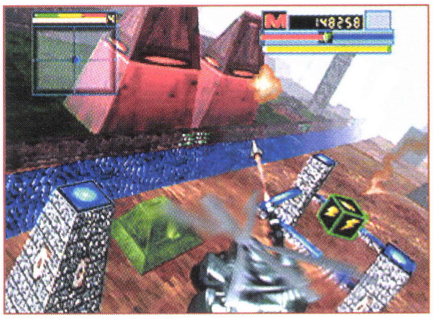
BladeForce

The consoles continue their PC invasion

Entering the crowded PC market, Studio 3DO presents their most well-received console game, *BladeForce*. Most companies' first-generation console conversions often failed to take advantage of the PC's advanced features, in particular its networking. *BladeForce* is an exception, as it will support up to four players via a network, and as a Windows 95 game will support other DirectPlay protocols.

BladeForce is an atypical 3D shoot 'em up. Instead of running around, you fly around in your Helipak Flight Suit, shooting loads of bad guys. The 3D engine supports six degrees of freedom so yes, this is *AirDoom* or *BladeDescent*. The setting is Meggagrid in 2110, with the usual bit of cyberpunk futuristic nihilism serving as the overriding theme. You'll be facing evil crime bosses as you try to negotiate the various levels, which are over 1000 screens in size. There will also be levels designed solely for multiplayer play.

Throughout the city you'll find the usual complement of power-ups (25 in all), have nine different weapons at your disposal and the environments look quite varied and attractive. Currently the game is only supporting 320x200 graphics, but future versions of the game will likely support high-resolution graphics (and perhaps Direct3D). Look for *BladeForce* to carve its way onto the market in early 1997. – *Steve Bauman*

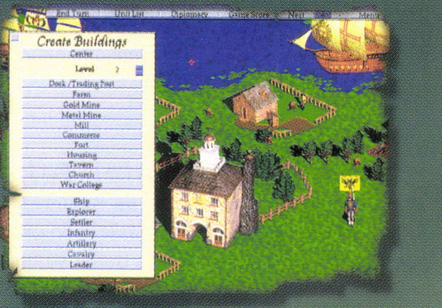


Here it is, in all of it's DoomCopter glory

Impressions gets active with Captives

Known exclusively for their strategy and wargaming titles, Sierra's Impressions division is entering the action gaming world with the release of their upcoming *Captives*. While few details were available at press time, Sierra is emphasizing the differences between the typical run-and-shoot action games and *Captives*. At the core of the differences is the game's goal: rescue of humans held captive by a "race of 'techno-organic' aliens." Moving throughout the various isometric sectors of a base over-run by the bad guys, you do your best to save captive scientists and soldiers and lead them to safety; once saved they'll work to support you (soldiers beef up your firepower, while saved scientists will research new technologies for you). Sounding like a mixture of *Crusader: No Regret*-style action and a *Defender* storyline, *Captives* is due for release by mid '97.

The New World Just Got Better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Unit List
Diplomacy
Game Score
Next
Menu
Create Buildings
Center
Level 2
Dock/Trading Post
Farm
Gold Mine
Metal Mine
Mill
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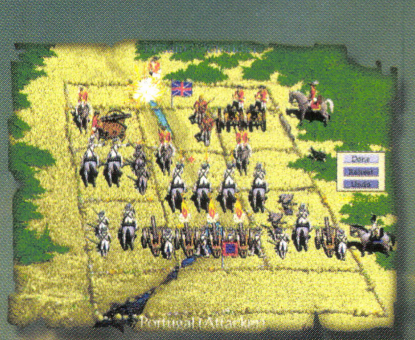
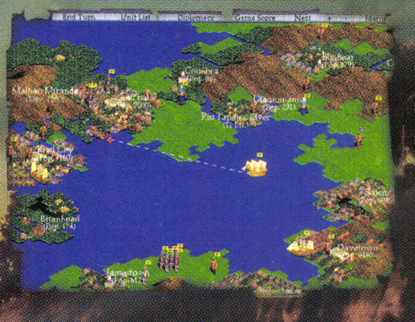

Done
Retreat
Undo
Portugal Attacked!


End Turn
Unit List
Diplomacy
Game Score
Next
Menu

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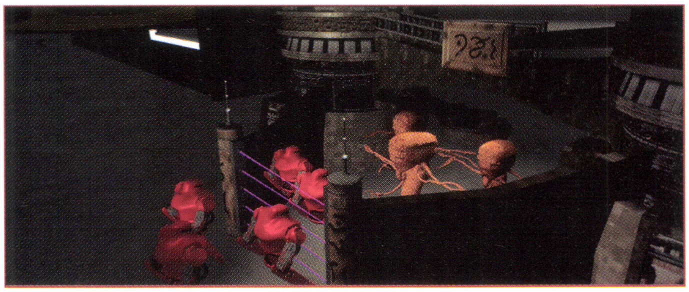
Cloak

Where your mind takes a leave of absence

You are a key agent for the interplanetary espionage organization of your homeworld Altopia. The Bulbs, strange beings from the planet-next-door, have developed a technology to enslave Altopia and take it for their own. It becomes necessary to send someone to infiltrate the Bulbs' homeworld, and it looks as though you are the optimal choice.

The problem is that the Bulbs can penetrate the minds of anyone appearing in physical disguise. Instead, you will join forces with the ultimately sophisticated surveillance robot, connecting to it through a telepresence pod which permits you to control it as though it were your eyes and ears. Your mind, however, remains where it belongs, in your skull where it cannot be detected by the Bulbs. The you-imbued robot will be cattled with all of the other robots which are exported daily to the Bulbs' world, and it's up to you to discover their secret before they discover *you*.

Cloak, Sierra On-Line's new science fiction thriller, uses a technique known as multi-threading, only recently adopted by adventure game programmers, which allows multiple activities to occur concurrently within a single program. A triple-window interface will allow you to perform three distinct tasks at once. This could be a remedy for the clinically bored.– *Cindy Yans*



Could Cloak become a modern version of Suspended?

NeoStar to auction assets

In what is perhaps the surest sign of the instability in the computer and video game markets, NeoStar Retail Group, the parent company of computer software stores Babbage's and Software Etc., filed a voluntary petition in September to reorganize under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code. On November 11, PRNewsire reported that NeoStar, its debtor-in-possession (DIP) lenders, trade creditors and Leonard Riggio, a director and stockholder, were unable to reach agreement on the terms of the transaction. NeoStar said that without any other viable alternatives it will be forced to auction off its remaining assets.

NeoStar had previously received $70 million in DIP financing in order to continue operating and placing its orders for the upcoming holiday season. NeoStar's chairman Thomas G. Plaskett was, at press time, in the process of seeking Bankruptcy Court authorization to proceed with the auction plan. Vendors have now been notified to stop shipping new inventory to NeoStar's companies.

NeoStar is the nation's leading chain of computer and video game stores. It operates over 650 stores, concentrated in shopping malls, in 49 states and employs over 5,000 people.

Out of the Void – No, Playmates Interactive's ***Into the Void*** hasn't disappeared into the void, it's just been delayed until Spring of '97... **MicroLeague gets Pro League** – MicroLeague Multimedia, of ***MicroLeague Baseball*** fame, has acquired MicroSports, of the ***ProLeague Sports*** fame. Next up: **Sports Illustrated Presents MicroLeague Baseball 6.0**.. **TacOps goes electronic** – Due to the increasing costs of printing and uncertain demand, **Arsenal Publishing** has decided to release their upcoming ***TacOps Battlebook*** in electronic format only. An on-line book will allow the inclusion of color photos, and all the information can be printed on an as-needed basis. The "book" will be shareware (price as yet undetermined)... **Zapped again** – The crew at **LavaMind** are working on an update to ***Zapitalizm***. ***Zap 2*** will implement many of the suggestions they've received on the original...

Intracorp files Chapter 11

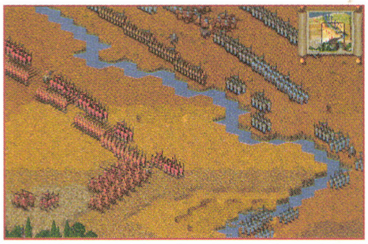
Intracorp (parent company to Capstone and 360 Pacific) has filed for reorganization under Chapter 11. While an Intracorp representative was unable to comment further, *CGS+* has learned from a former employee that the financially stricken company has been reduced to a small core of 12-13 employees; this source claims that the entire 360 Pacific team was either laid off or has left the company, and that the only project currently being worked on is the 3D shooter *Fate*. Apparently the *Harpoon II Admiral's Edition* was finished and has in fact shipped overseas, but Intracorp has been unable to find a distributor for North America (a version of the Platform Editor, the key new component of the *Admiral's Edition*, is available on the Internet; whether this is the full version or indeed even authorized shareware is unclear). The status of other previously announced titles like *Hammer's Slammers* and *V for Victory 2: The Pacific Campaign* is uncertain.

The Great Battles of Alexander

Another look at a long-lost wargame

First described back in our December '94 issue (# 49, p. 54), *The Great Battles of Alexander* has been a "lost child" of the computer wargaming world, moving from one publisher to another. It's found a home with Interactive Magic, continuing a trend wherein they give new life to an orphan wargame product (*American Civil War* and *Harpoon Classic '97* are the other two).

Based on the GMT Games' board wargame, *Alexander* is billed as an easy-to-play wargame which will nonetheless satisfy hardcore wargamers. The game will combine a visual look somewhat akin to that in various "micro miniatures" style games with that of the isometric, hex-based terrain seen in TalonSoft's *Battleground* series. While animation of the units is included (and should be quite extensive), it's not the focus of the gameplay. Instead, careful handling of your troops and leaders as you fight your way through the various battles (in the pre-alpha there are ten, ranging from Pelium in the West to Hydaspes in the East). While not real-time, the initiative-based play (built around the quality of your leaders) should lend the game a more realistic, fluid style of gaming than the old "you move all, I move all" style seen in most turn-based computer wargames. – *Scott Udell*



One of the two levels of zoom in; a third is being considered

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It's awesome! Get ready to experience the most realistic World War II simulation ever developed.

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Muzzle Velocity puts you *in the middle of the action* in a real-time interactive 3D environment complete with texture mapping and spectacular 32-channel digital sound.

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From the "satellite" view, you can command a single platoon or an entire battalion from an Allied or Axis nation (your choice).

You'll have complete control over battle strategy and tactics, artillery, inventory...everything.

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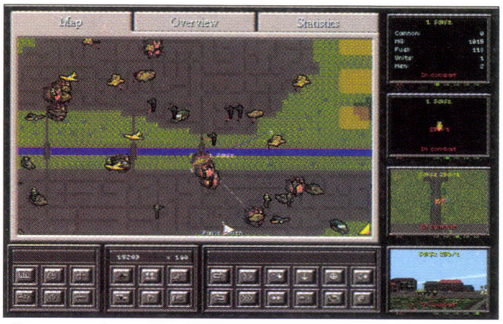
You'll see and participate in monumental tank battles. You'll take part in fierce ground assaults. And, you'll have face-to-face combat action in cities, fields and forests in both good and bad weather.

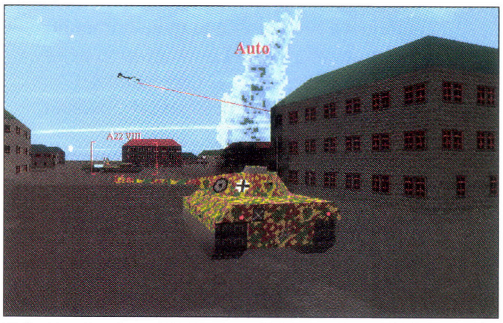
Muzzle Velocity is fun to play and easy to use. And, with special training missions and on-line help you'll be ready for action immediately.

TRY MUZZLE VELOCITY YOURSELF

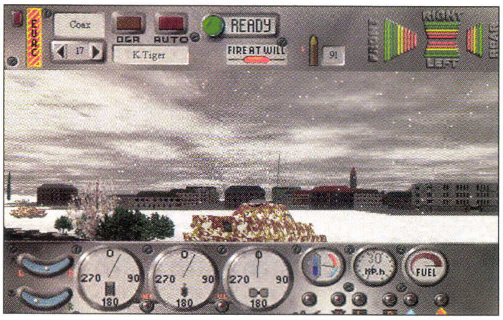
Go ahead. Try the Muzzle Velocity DEMO on the demo disk that came with this magazine and experience a higher level of game play than you ever dreamed of. Or better yet, call 1-800-551-0100 with your VISA or MasterCard and get the full version.



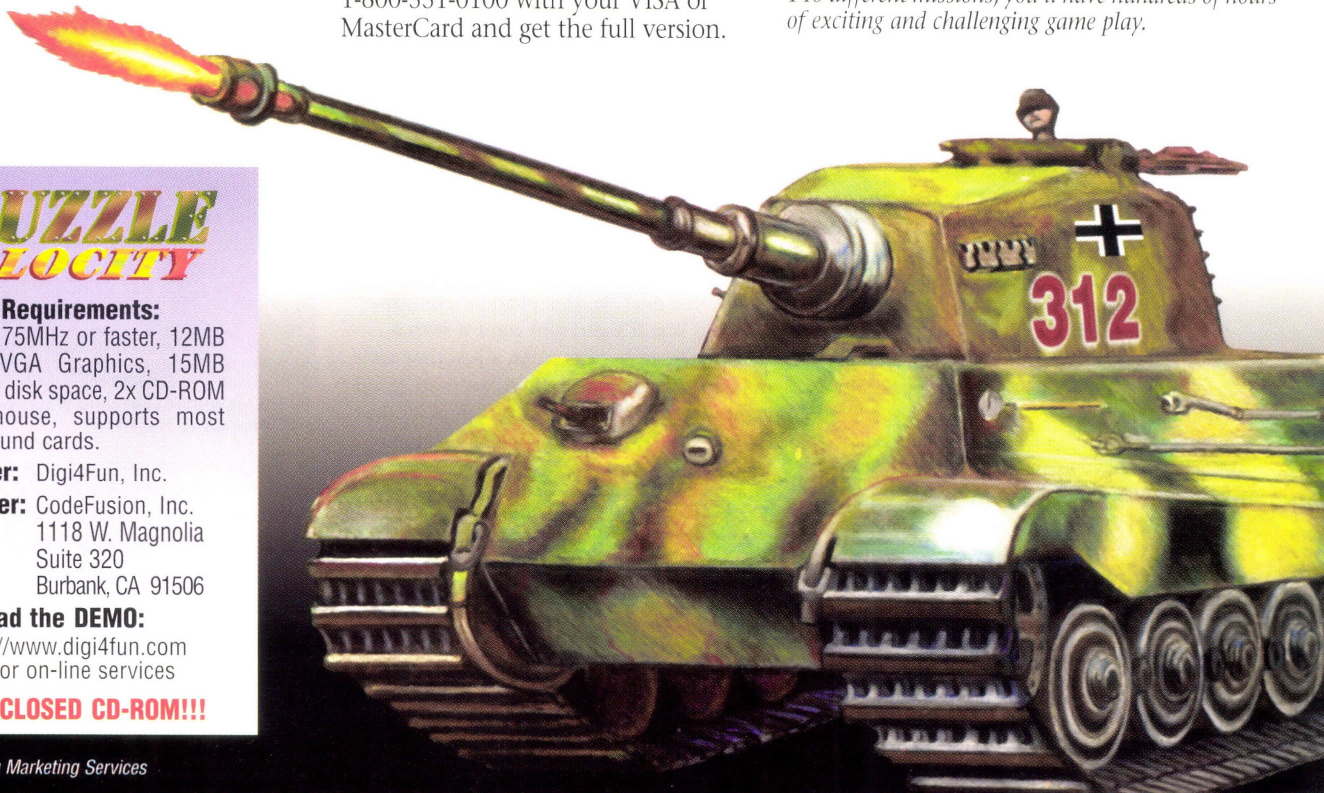
Command your troops from the detailed satellite view. Or leap into the most intense real-time 3-D war action you've ever seen in a strategy wargame.



Select a tank, vehicle or soldier and you'll instantly find yourself on the battlefield. The action is so real you'll swear you hear bullets whizzing by your ear.



The graphics are absolutely first rate. And, with over 140 different missions, you'll have hundreds of hours of exciting and challenging game play.



MUZZLE VELOCITY

System Requirements: Pentium 75MHz or faster, 12MB RAM, SVGA Graphics, 15MB free hard disk space, 2x CD-ROM drive, mouse, supports most major sound cards.

Designer: Digi4Fun, Inc.

Publisher: CodeFusion, Inc.
1118 W. Magnolia
Suite 320
Burbank, CA 91506

Download the DEMO:
http://www.digi4fun.com
major on-line services

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Scarab

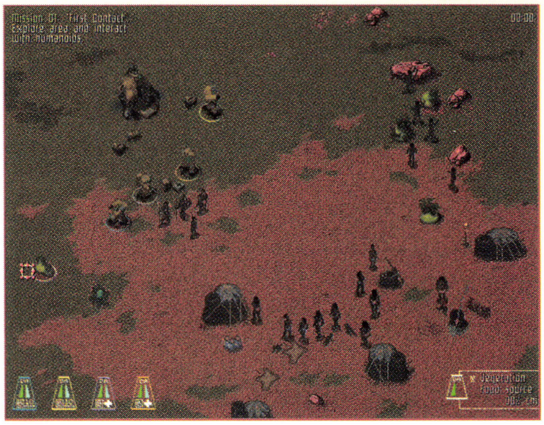
More real-time strategy from Down Under

It sure does seem like we're really seeing an explosion in the number of Australian game developers. The latest is a developer called Eternal; a small team primarily consisting of three designer/developers known (at least on the 'net) as Machine, Professor, and Shadow. Their first project is a real-time strategy game called *SCARAB* (short for "Surface Crawling Articulated Robotic Assault Battalion").

With just a brief glance at developmental screen shots you might be tempted to write *SCARAB* off as just another *Command & Conquer* clone; closer investigation, however, reveals some true design innovations. The back story to the game is nothing particularly original: a new, fertile planet has been found, and four separate factions are gearing up to fight for control for the planet and its resources. What *does* sound original is the method of getting you, the gamer into the fight: instead of choosing a side and fighting its campaign, and then playing the campaign through from the perspective of another side, you take on the role of a mercenary SCARAB commander. You choose the missions offered by the various sides, and your performance and combat style *during* the mission determine the choice of follow-on missions: if you're a destroy-everything-in-sight kind of gamer, you'll be more attractive to the Reds, while if you do your best to make peace and defend innocents, you'll get calls from the Blues. If Eternal can pull it off, this should lead to a very fluid campaign structure with plenty of replayability.

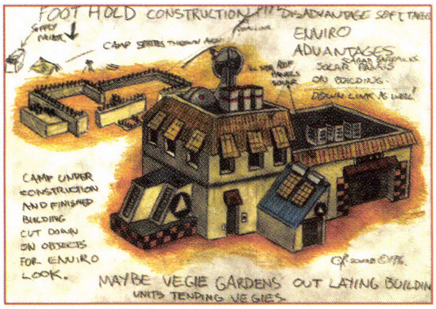
For each mission you'll be given from one to six units (you'll have some control over the selection), from troops to the giant SCARAB platforms themselves. Production and resource gathering are not a part of the game, though you will be able to capture enemy buildings and weapons systems, sometimes carrying them forward to future missions. Unlike past real-time games, you'll be able to modify the vehicles under your control, outfitting them with new and improved systems as a mission progresses (rather like you could improve your Hercs in *MissionForce: Cyberstorm*, but this time during the mission).

Due out sometime in the second quarter of 1997, Eternal has yet to sign with a publisher (although they are apparently talking with several). Once they do, we'll be sure to bring you the info, along with a more in-depth look at the game itself. – *Scott Udell*



Mission 01: 'First Contact'
Explore area and interact
with humanoids.

The planet upon which SCARAB action takes place has native inhabitants; how you interact with these innocents determines, in part, the path your gameplay will take



SCARAB sketch art

A wargame connection – Open to the public, **CONNECTIONS** is an annual conference between the military and civilian wargaming and simulation communities held at Maxwell AFB. The registration fee will be approximately $40; for first-time attendees, the conference will begin on Tuesday February 25th and will continue through the 28th. Military speakers will initiate the newcomers, and boardgame designer Richard Berg will address the civilian print wargame area while M. Evan Brooks will provide an introduction to the civilian computer wargame area. Prior attendees have included Jim Dunnigan, Peter Perla, Dave Arneson, Gary Grigsby, Mark Baldwin, Ed Bever, etc. For more information, send a query to **mcaffrey@max1.au.af.mil** or a note to Air Command and Staff College, Attn: Matt Caffrey/DEC, 225 Chenault Circle, Maxwell AFB, Montgomery, AL 36112-6426. ■

Battle ready

TalonSoft announces their 1997 lineup

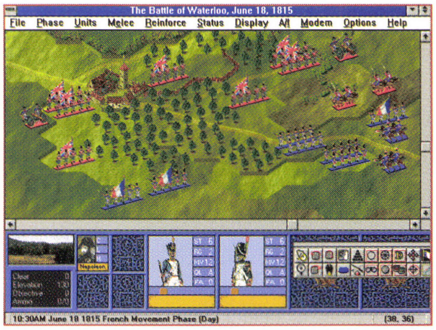
With two games already out in '96 (*Waterloo* and *Shiloh*), a rework of *Ardennes* (called *Battleground: Bulge*) and *Battleground: Antietam* just in, and *Age of Sail* due out by the time you read this, you'd think the folks at TalonSoft would be ready to slow down. But no, their release schedule for '97 is if anything even more ambitious than '96. The first two games in the schedule are *Prelude to Waterloo* and *Bull Run*. *Prelude to Waterloo* had originally been scheduled as a possible add-on to *Battleground: Waterloo*, but with the popularity of that game and the demand for more Napoleonic coverage, TalonSoft decided to flesh it out into a full release.

You'll be able to play either the battle of Ligny or Qutre-Bras, or even fight both battles at once on a map even larger than that in *Waterloo*. One change to the *Battleground* engine that they are considering for *Prelude* is the addition of a counter charge option. *Bull Run* will include both 1st and 2nd Manassas.

Slipped in the development schedule is *Battleground: Middle East* (renamed from *Sinai* because too many corporate buyers didn't know what "Sinai" was). *Middle East* will probably have some of the first major changes to the *Battleground* engine since *Gettysburg*, including–possibly–a scenario editor. For later in the year TalonSoft has announced *East Front*, a platoon-level game of World War II East Front combat with a new campaign system; *Nam*, a real-time tactical game set in Vietnam; and two more naval games tentatively titled *Age of Ironclads* (covering the period from the Civil War into the late 1800s) and *Age of Oars* (triremes to Viking raiders, 3000BC to 1200AD).

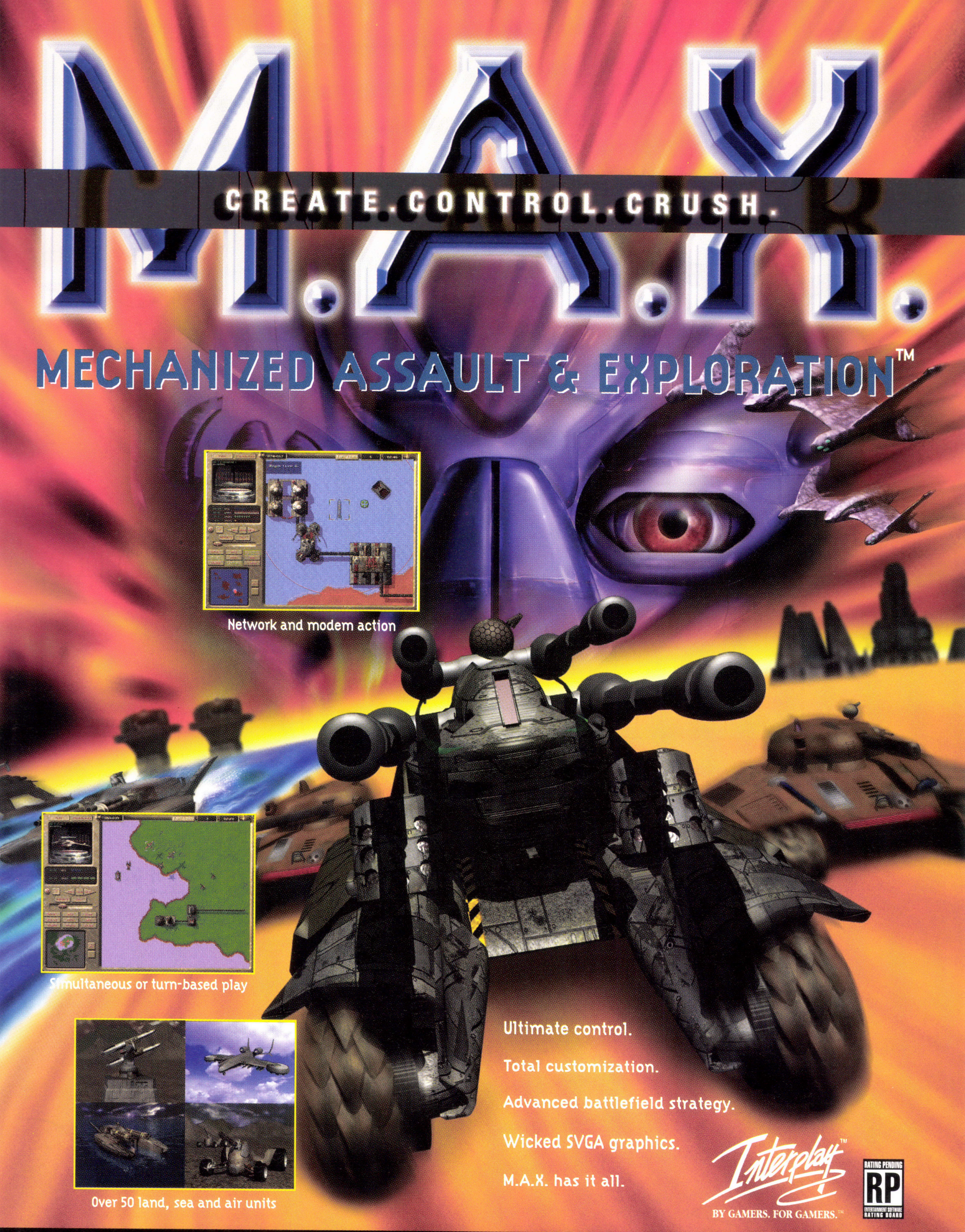
In terms of technology, TalonSoft is committed to moving towards Internet play, with plans for both adding that technology to future games (and retrofitting it where possible to older titles) and looking into on-line gaming. The issue of editors is also being looked into; for some of the coming titles we may see scenario editors (wherein gamers will be able to use the existing maps and Orders of Battle to create their own battles) and possibly map editors (they are somewhat reluctant to do this as the map quality will suffer; current game maps are done largely by hand).

Lastly, Jim Rose at TalonSoft has intimated that they are close to signing a well-known wargame industry talent; who this might be or exactly what the relationship will be is as yet uncertain. – *Scott Udell*



10:30AM June 18 1815 French Movement Phase (Day)
(38, 36)

TalonSoft will be following Waterloo (pictured) with Prelude to Waterloo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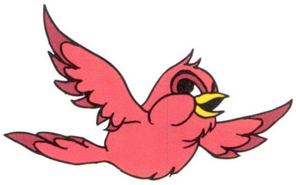
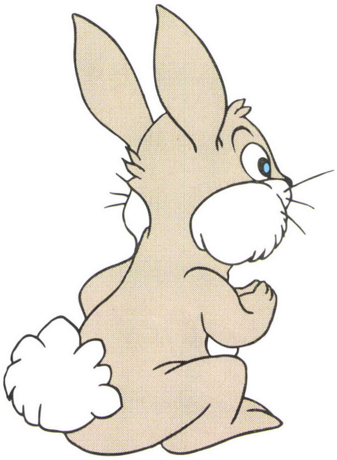
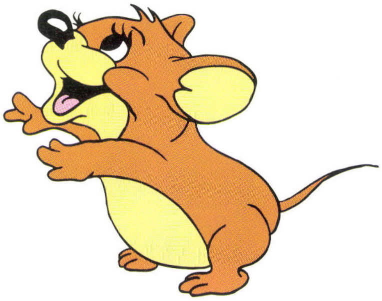
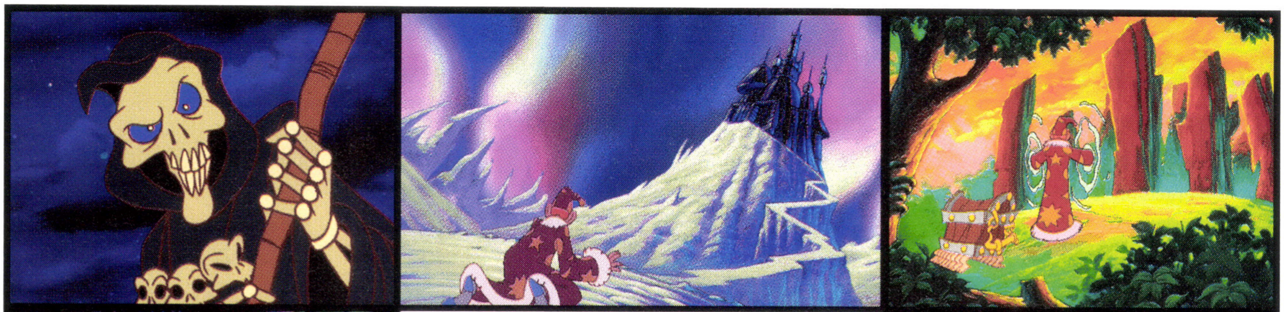


Once upon a time,
in an enchanted kingdom,
there lived a big bosomed
lady and some gerbils.







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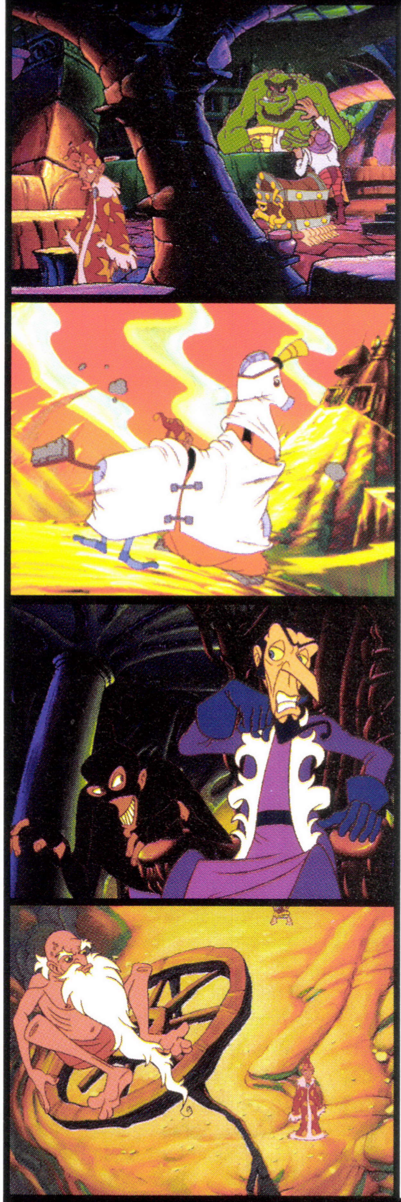
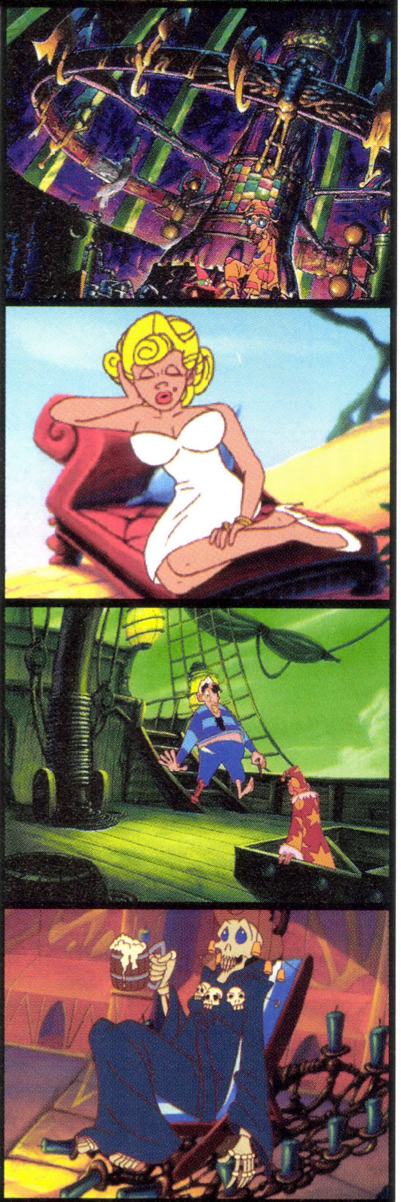
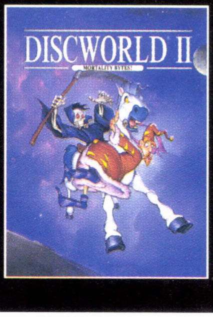
[Discworld II features the voice of Eric Idle, former star of Monty-something-or-other.]

Rincewind must find a way to restore order in the world. You'll be dazzled by 25,000 cells of hand-drawn animation. You'll be delighted by the fiendishly clever puzzles. You'll be deeply offended by the vocal stylings of Eric Idle. Discworld II: Mortality Bytes. It's magical. It's enchanting. It's sick.







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Microsoft Sidewinder GamePad

The best gamepad for any machine on the market. Period

Once limited to the consoles, the gamepad has finally emerged on the PC as the best controller for certain types of games (action and sports). Gravis was there first; most gamers still use a Gravis Gamepad or GRiP. Until now.

The Microsoft Sidewinder GamePad is, by far, the best gamepad on the market, and one of the most well-designed and conceived controllers available. It provides a directional pad, eight buttons (six on the face of the unit, two triggers on the bottom) and a start button. With the new drivers and software provided, you can configure all the buttons and save setups for specific games. The new drivers also end the need for further calibration of both the Gamepad and the 3D Pro.

The controller is exceptionally well designed, both aesthetically and ergonomically, and will fit perfectly in most players' hands. The pad and buttons have an excellent feel. A joystick plug is built into the gamepad itself, allowing you to daisy-chain up to six controllers for multi-player gaming. If you own a 3D Pro, you can plug it into the Gamepad, allowing you to switch between the two without fiddling with cables on the back of your machine.

Overall, this is a superb controller; pair the gamepad up with one of their Sidewinder 3D Pro's and you have a serious gaming setup that'll be tough for the competition to beat. – *Steve Bauman*

MindDrive

From thought to game?

Gamers are always looking for new and unique ways to control that spaceship, plane, or mini-gun toting hero. Joystick, mouse, keyboard, get replaced by more esoteric controllers, like the spaceball. On the most esoteric end of the scale is a new widget from The Other 90% Technologies, called *MindDrive*. An innocuous little device, it sits on a finger and uses bio-electric impulses instead of physical movements. In its current state, the control achieved is sparse; you are basically limited to up/down and left/right, but the folks at The Other 90% are working to expand this somewhat. These biofeedback devices have been around for years, but it looks like the *MindDrive* is a little further along; with a little "practice" (and you really need to practice, as using the *MindDrive* is more of an art than anything else) I was able to get recognizable responses much of the time from the system. Sometimes, however, the interpreted input would be quite different from the intended; for the most part, the accuracy is about on a par with that in early voice recognition systems. The product comes with simple tutorial/test software and a copy of *MindSkier*, one of several packages released (or planned) for the system. Currently, the drivers are DOS only; if you even try to run *MindSkier* from Windows 95 you'll get an error. Because of the limited nature of the *MindDrive* control range, *MindSkier* is also limited; as a stand-alone game it probably wouldn't do well even as shareware. – *Scott Udell*

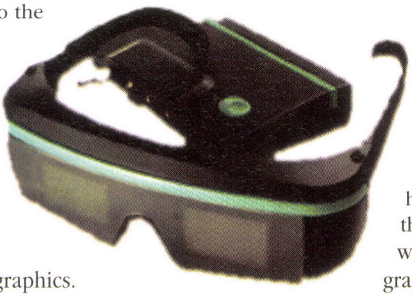
3D gaming on the cheap

Liquid-crystal shutter glasses return from oblivion

An older technology, glasses equipped with liquid crystal shutters provide an alternative to expensive, full "virtual reality" rigs; giving you an inexpensive approximation of 3D and VR. Such devices work in conjunction with your monitor to achieve the 3D effect; liquid crystal shutters in the lenses of the glasses alternately darken one eye (say the left) while the other is clear and viewing the picture on the monitor designed for it. By rapidly flipping the shutters and left-right pictures on the monitor, you can get a 3D effect on the screen (similar to the old Viewmaster's).

At least, that's the idea. We had two different sets of these glasses arrive at nearly the same time; one called *3-D Spex* from NuVision and the other called *SimulEyes* from Stereographics. Both come packaged with 3D-enabled shareware versions of several older games (*Descent II*, *Slipstream 5000*, and *Whiplash* are in both, and *SimulEyes* also includes *Rise of the Triad* and *In Pursuit of Greed*). Both units will have similar street prices (under $100), and both claim that upcoming titles will support their products (although Stereographics admitted that two games–*Shattered Steel* and *F-22 Lightning II*–that were supposed to have support shipped without it, or with it poorly implemented, but that patches are planned). The *3-D Spex* are powered by an adapter and plug into your printer port (no pass-through for your printer cable), while the *SimulEyes* are battery powered and attach to your computer via your monitor port (a pass through is, of course, included).

3-D Spex



SimulEyes

The *3-D Spex* have better documentation and sample software (nice to have when you want to test the glasses), but on a P-60 with an average monitor and graphics card the flicker was very noticeable (and a headache was instantaneous) and at least one of the sample games – *Slipstream 5000* – ran considerably slower than the version included with *SimulEyes*. The *SimulEyes*, on the other hand, had less flicker, but the 3D effect wasn't as apparent (sometimes not at all), and on neither of the glasses could I see objects appearing to be "out" of the plane of the monitor for any of the games.

For both glasses, many of my complaints revolve around computing/video hardware not being up to the standards they really require (documentation on both glasses say they'll work best with a vertical refresh rate of *120 Hz*!) and software/driver limitations (the games included in both packages were not originally designed for the technology). So, while the hardware is sound and the potential exists, the products as they stand this minute aren't really up to snuff. – *Scott Udell*

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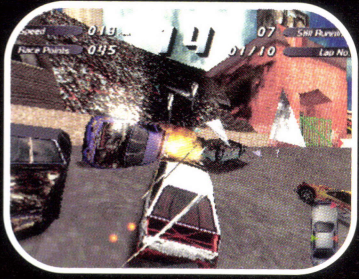
How did we come up with the exciting new features found in Destruction Derby 2?

By accident.



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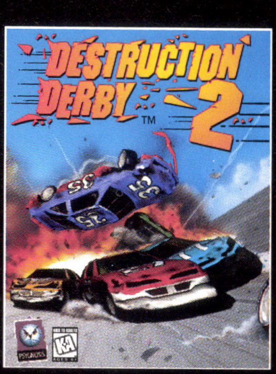
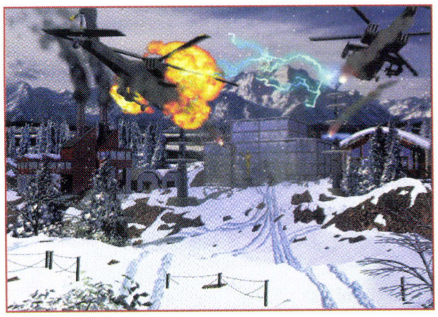


This section of the magazine updates you on pre-release versions of software. In some cases, the games are considered "reviewable" by their producers; however, we feel they are in some way incomplete. We will be giving a full review on these products in coming months.

Command & Conquer: Red Alert

Westwood Studios

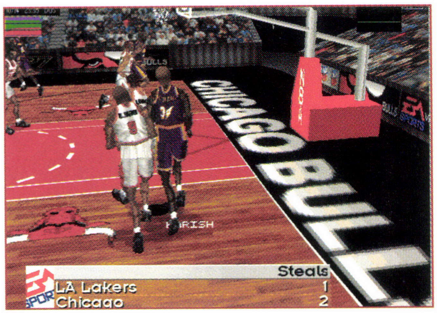
Though not final at press time (about two weeks away), it's clear that *Red Alert* is not just *Command & Conquer* in SVGA. It has a better story, new units, beefed-up gameplay and a surprisingly challenging AI. Sadly, the resource management is still limited, the interface unwieldy and the scenario progression linear. The premise is a campy bit of revisionist history that pits Albert Einstein against Joseph Stalin somewhere between World Wars II and III. True to its predecessor, *Red Alert*'s unique story is nicely realized in a series of fun cutscenes. Enhancements to unit management make this real-time strategy game a bit less frantic. New units include guard dogs, barbed wire, subs, spy planes, paratroopers, flame throwers, and a whole bag of secret hi-tech toys, to name a few. The distinctive strategies necessary for each side make for solid game balance and a variety of playing styles, which should make this a staple of multiplayer gaming for a long time to come. – *Tom Chick*



NBA Live 97

EA Sports

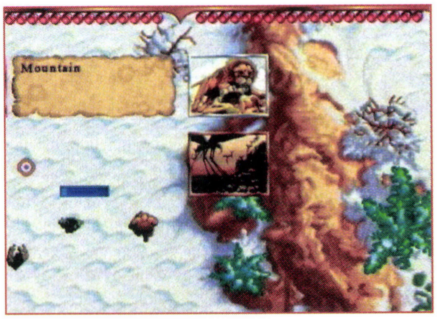
Though dubbed a "review" copy by EA Sports, this version of the world's most popular basketball game is lacking the final network code, has glitches in the 3D engine and crashes too often. Despite this, it's clear the combination of polygonal characters and high-resolution courts will be hard for the competition to top (slam dunks never looked so good). Gameplay looks solid; playing a brief game made clear that the new camera angles are a easier to deal with than the ones in *NBA Live 96*. The AI, as always, will require a lot more testing to see if it's up to snuff. One great feature: the Windows 95 version supports daisy-chained Microsoft GamePads (as well as the Gravis GRiP). The game still lacks Michael Jordan, but that's not EA Sports' fault; it's the NBA's.. – *Steve Bauman*



Magic The Gathering: Battlemage

Acclaim

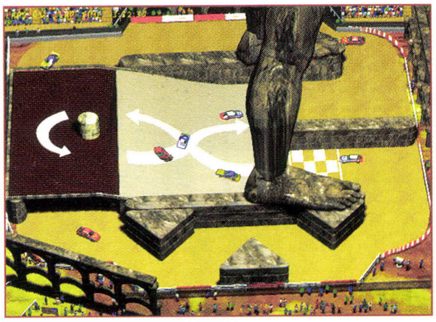
Somewhat of a surprise after the long wait for MicroProse's *Magic* game, the beta we received is labeled as being "75% complete." The game's equivalent to an on-line card reference currently lists some 173 cards (34 white, 25 blue, 35 black, 38 red, and 41 green), but we've heard a few more will be included in the final version. The user interface is still being worked on, but even so, it looks like *Battlemage* will deliver on its promise to actually bring *Magic* creatures to life for real-time combat; while attempts to summon creatures weren't very successful (owing to a lack of knowledge of, err, *Magic* and the real-time nature of the game), the computer-controlled dueling opponent had no such problems and quickly did away with me each time. The campaign game (between eight wizard-characters known as plainswalkers) is running if not complete, and a deck builder option is under construction. – *Scott Udell*



Nitro Racers

Studio 3DO

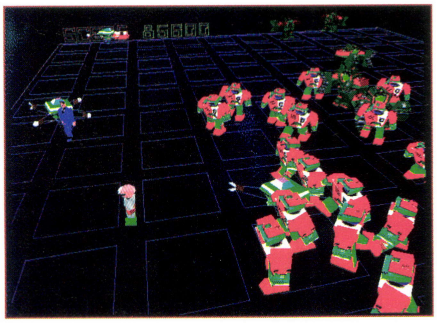
You'd think the world would have had enough of silly arcade games. Just look around and you'll see it isn't so, oh no. Some people want to fill the world with silly arcade games. What's wrong with that? They need to know. Because here they go… again. *Nitro Racers* is one of those "one more time" sort of cheap little arcade racing game like they used to make for the arcade or the console systems. The only problem with the current version is the lack of sound, but with 30 tracks to race on and a kit to make your own, it's fun fun fun in a really dumb way. It won't cover unsightly blemishes, but it will provide racing fun for up to eight players over a LAN. – *Steve Bauman*



Robotron X

Williams Entertainment

Make no mistake; *Robotron* is one of the finest pure action games ever created. One of the simplest games to learn and the most difficult to master, it featured a control scheme, two joysticks, one for movemen and one for firing, that was perfect (Crack Dot Com's *Abuse*, with its supremely elegant keyboard/mouse interface, is a spiritual descendant). *Robotron X* is an isometric 3D version of the original. While the gameplay is sure to be exciting, it's hard not to be skeptical that a substitute for the original interface will be found; the current keyboard configuration makes it feel like an ultra-violent *Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing 3D*. – *Steve Bauman*



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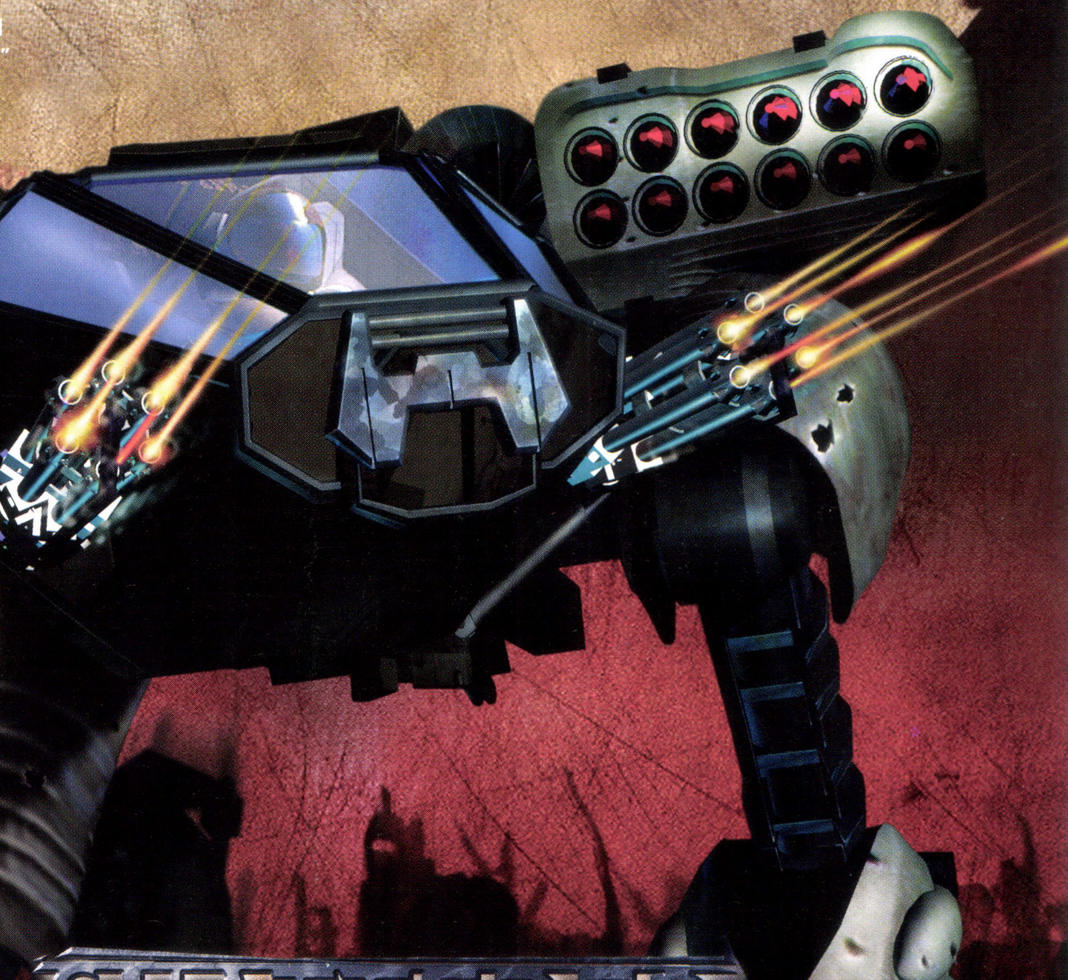

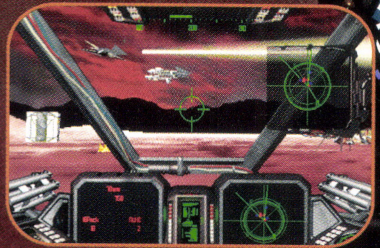

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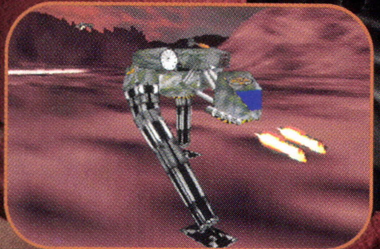

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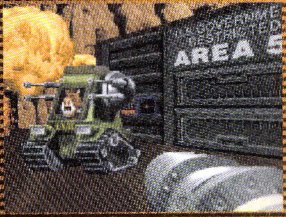

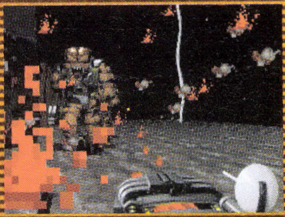

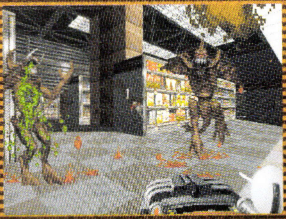

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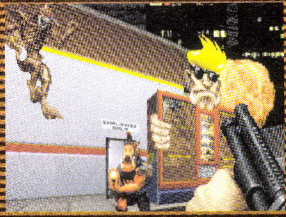

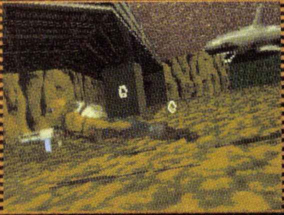

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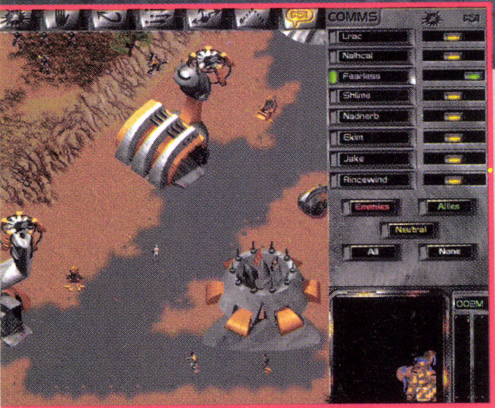
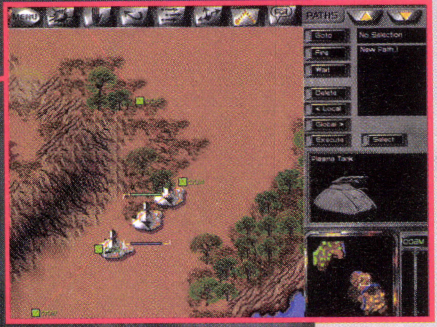
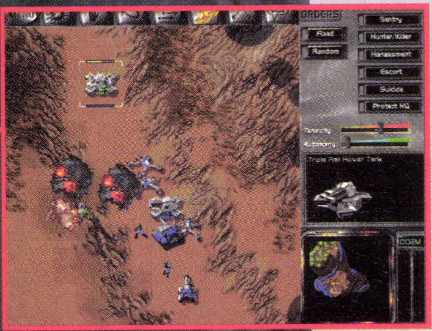


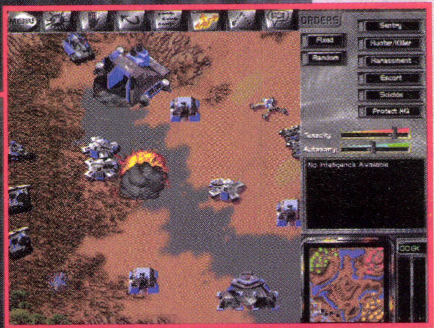
Base defense will be even more important than in C&C



Two aircraft unleash a wave of missiles



A hover tank holds its own



An armored clash

Place yourself way back in mid-1995 (!). *Dune II* and *Warcraft* had smallish cult followings, and anyone who said that real-time strategy gaming would be the next big wave in computer games might have been laughed out of the business. Now, a year and a half later, with sales of *Command & Conquer* and *Warcraft II* past the incredible million mark, few people are laughing; instead many are trying to figure out how to "catch the wave," as it were. Activision, while an industry giant, isn't really known for its strategy games, especially in recent years; their design expertise just doesn't lie in this direction. Australis Microprogramming, on the other hand, is a group of hard-core strategy gamers with a game engine to die for, but little or no capability to put together and distribute a final product. Hmm, can you guess where this leads?

The result of the marriage of the above-named is a game called *Dark Reign: the Future of War*. I'm not quite sure how the title fits in with the fiction, but for once the fiction sounds like it's been well integrated into the gameplay. In a distant future, a dark, evil empire (the Imperium) and a rag-tag bunch of rebels (the "renegade Freedom Guard") are battling it out for the heart, soul, and precious materials (in the game, water, access to which is controlled by the Imperium, and something called Element 115, a fuel which, if I remember my chemistry class, would be something *really* unstable) of a variety of planets, moons, and asteroid belts. Sounds like *Star Wars*, right? Well, not quite, because you're not a member of *either* side; instead, you belong to a lost splinter of humanity who fled the area in the distant past. The problem is that one of the planets upon which war is now raging contains the recently-discovered stasis capsule of your near-mythical leader, a man who, just before he was lost, discovered the secrets behind matter transmutation. But being a lost splinter of humanity, you know nothing of the ways of either the Imperium or the Freedom Guard, and that's where the gameplay of *Dark Reign* comes in. Using historical "simulations" (*i.e.*, missions), you fight out battles between the two sides, *as either side*, learning their capabilities and weaknesses. You can either play the missions in a linear fashion (good for beginners to real-time strategy gaming, since concepts will be introduced slowly), or pick and choose between the six or seven campaign groups (with a total of 37 missions). Missions will take place on a variety of terrain: jungles, volcanoes, urban moons and ice plains. There will be over 30 missions to try out, ranging from out-and-out combat to ambushes and spy missions. Once you've worked through these "simulations" you'll be able to take on *both* sides in "real" combat using their own weapons and tactics against them (and, perhaps, some new technology of your own).

The V-8 of real-time game engines?

Activision is particularly proud about the engine behind the gaming; in fact, they've implemented several things not seen in last year's real-time games. Terrain plays a much more realistic role in *Dark Reign* than it has in most games of this type. Different types of terrain will cause units to move differently (tanks through mud is *not* a good idea). Elevation now matters (the game will have eight levels; while multiple water depths are in the engine, they won't be used in *Dark Reign*), affecting both individual unit performance and your overall strategy. Hills, for example, affect both a unit's rate of movement and its line of sight; some units negotiating hillsides will have to slow down, and most ground units will be unable to see around hills. You'll be able to set ambushes or move under cover, hiding below the crest of a hill, in a ditch, or even under trees (ground units under trees will be mostly invisible to air units). The "line-of-site" of your units will be combined graphically on the screen, with out-of-site regions being shaded and the shading changing in real-time as your units move. Even basic map size is different; Activision says that the maps battles will be fought on will be at least four times–and possibly eight to ten times with extra memory–larger than those found in "existing games" like *C&C* or *Warcraft II*, and they don't have to be square (expect, for example, a scenario on a long, thin map, simulating an assault down a narrow valley). Maps will be one of eight terrain types (six "terrestrial" and two wholly alien), and terrain overlays (especially forests) will be dynamic; those trees that could have masked your assault earlier now block it completely.

While the terrain effects will be nice, the complexity of unit interactions should make for an even more interesting game. Aside from a wild variety of unit types (see sidebar for just a few of these), you'll have many more control options for units in *Dark Reign*. As with *Command & Conquer: Red Alert*, you'll be able to set waypoints for units and move groups of them in formation; waypoints can be adjusted on-the-fly if necessary, and you can issue preset actions to occur when a unit reaches a waypoint. A unit moving on a path won't necessarily follow a strict straight line; if there's an obstacle (like a lake), the unit will move around it. In addition to paths assigned on-the-fly, the game will allow for up to 14

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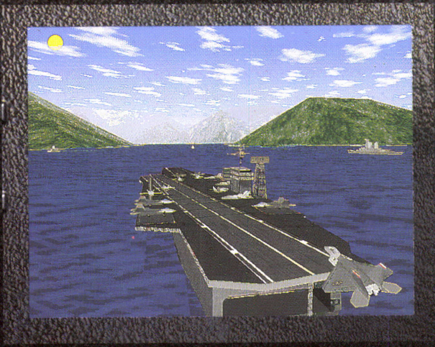

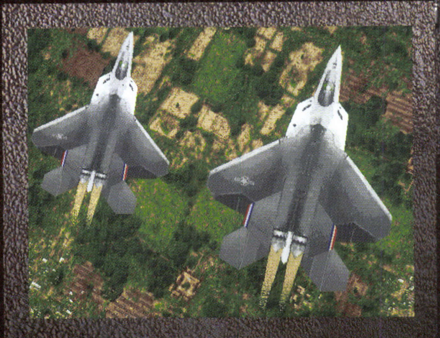

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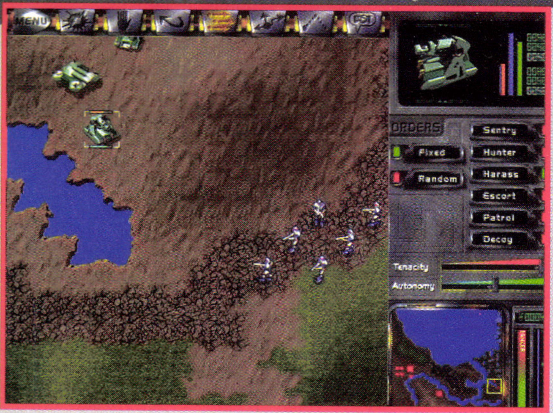
Dark Reign?

strategy gaming

by Scott Udell



pre-defined paths (with nearly unlimited waypoints possible per path) to be named and saved ahead of time, and applied as needed to a unit or group. With these paths you'll be able to plot a coordinated assault; design your paths, assign them to units or groups, and hit execute when you're ready for your assault move out. Of course, while you're doing this your enemy may be just blitzing forward *C&C*-style; it should be interesting to see how the two styles of play work together.

A unit's autonomy level can be set; put it on high and it can pretty much go off on its own, low and you'll need to baby it along. You can even determine a "tenacity" level (the point at which a unit will choose to get the heck outta Dodge). You'll be able to choose from eight "missions" to assign an AI-controlled unit, including sentry actions, hunter/killer, harassment, escort, suicide assault, and HQ protection. A unit or group can be assigned a fixed order type, or be allowed to choose which mission is most appropriate for its current situation.

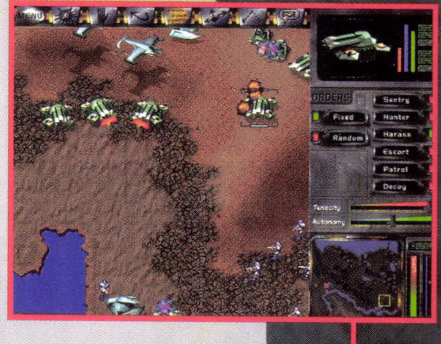
A wargame-like "command and control" structure will be simulated through the use of an HQ unit. The HQ can "support" a certain number of units; if you build beyond its limit, your efficiency and performance will drop across the board until you either build another HQ (an expensive option) or lose some units. This will help balance out play by preventing the temptation to produce massive waves of units, and gives gamers the option to play slow and big or fast and small.

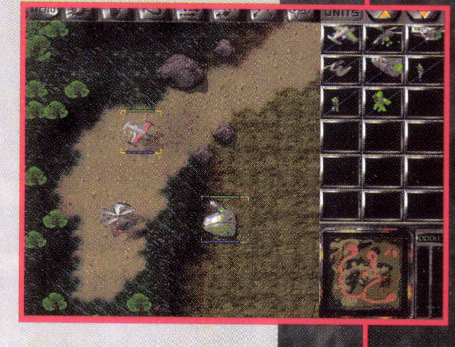
Let's not forget multi-player and a scenario construction kit

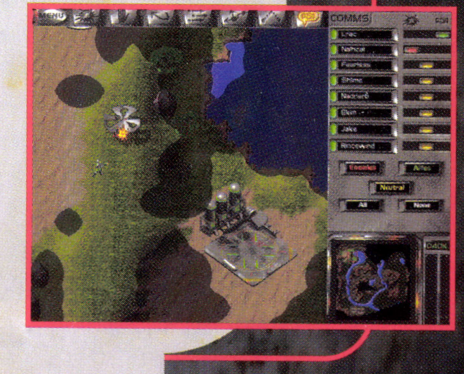
Obviously multiplayer will play a big part in *Dark Reign*. You'll be able to play two players via a modem, four players over the Internet, and up to eight players on a LAN. Additionally, groups on one LAN will be able to challenge players on a connected LAN (for those of us with multiple LANs in our homes!), or even play LAN-to-LAN over a phone connection; you might even have someone dialing in to the LAN via modem and another coming in over the Internet. In multi-player games everyone starts out neutral, neither allied nor at war, thereby preventing the instant combat which can start when two players begin the game near each other. You'll be able to share intelligence and/or resources with your allies (on an ally-by-ally basis). True alliances will lead to very close sharing possibilities: use your ally's repair facility, exchange supplies, lend units, or even globally share control over all your units. In the extreme, you'll even be able to transfer credits and give units (not just loan them) to your ally. Depending on the options chosen at start up, you can eliminate the competition and then turn on your ally or win as a team, an option that's all-too-rare in computer gaming.

Even if you get bored with the included missions, you'll be able to extend your gameplay quite a while with the very complete "construction kit" Activision plans to package with the product. The kit goes far beyond the now-standard map and scenario editors, allowing you to assign AI to units, design preset paths, modify game variables, insert your own artwork, and even design new unit types (by changing the values on existing unit types). New campaigns will be available on Activision's web site (**www.activision.com**) at the time of the game's release; you can be sure there will be plenty more to follow.

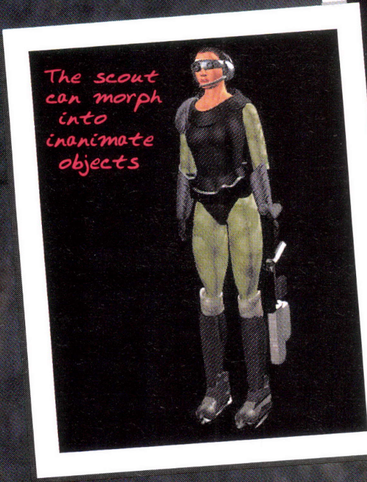
Dark Reign is likely only the beginning for this new engine technology. While the original Australis game *Corporation: Off World* almost certainly won't be published (it was deemed too complex), Activision is sure to continue using their powerful engine technology in the future (there are already plenty of ideas for a *Dark Reign II*, which could come out late in '97 if *Dark Reign* is well received). If current plans hold up, *Dark Reign* should be out for DOS by the first quarter of '97, with the Windows 95 version following some six weeks later. ■

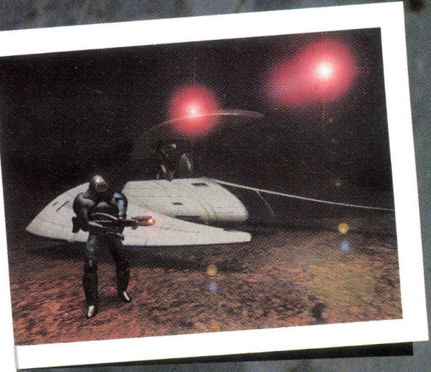


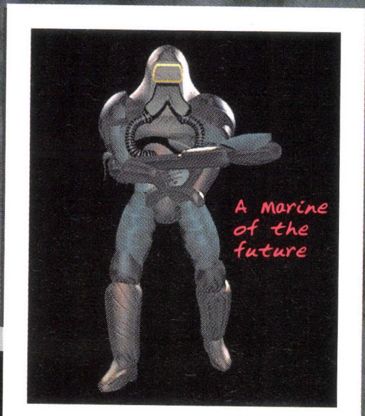


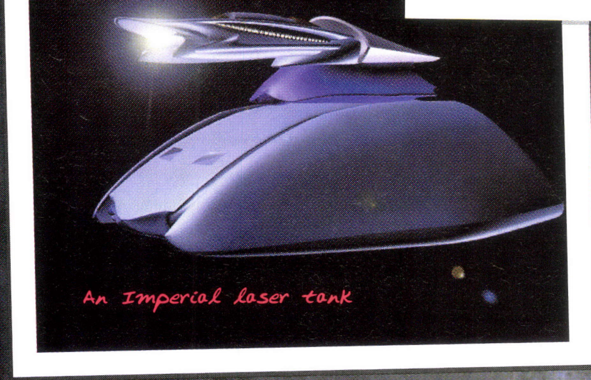


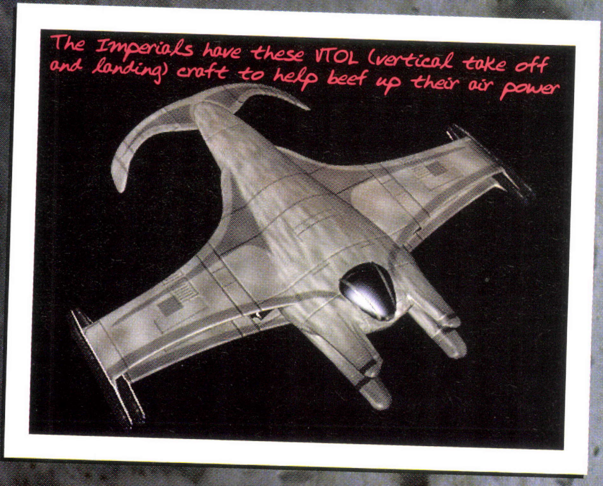
Deviousness abounds: some unit types in Dark Reign


The scout can morph into inanimate objects




A marine of the future


An Imperial laser tank


The Imperials have these VTOL (vertical take off and landing) craft to help beef up their air power

The units we've seen heretofore in real-time strategy games have been fairly straight-forward, honest combat units; be it guns, missiles, or swords, they were generally direct-attack kinds of units. The most devious we've seen have been, say, the stealth tanks of *C&C* or the magic users and explosive wielders of *Warcraft II*; somewhat sneaky but still fairly simple in their deviousness. *Dark Reign* promises some 36 unit types (both personnel and vehicular) that are more complex and *much* sneakier on the battlefield; we include here descriptions of just of few of these.

Body Snatcher: This stealthy unit can "body slam" an enemy, taking over it's identity and using it for 5-10 seconds before it wears off, after which it can go after another nearby unit. Activision says it can be quite useful in taking out an entire formation in pretty short order, especially since it does it so silently that the enemy player won't notice unless he or she watches it happen.

Hostage Taker: An Imperium unit, this vehicle will capture an enemy trooper, "lobotomize" it, strap a bomb to its back, and send it running back across the battlefield towards friendly units. Be wary of vacant-eyed friends bearing gifts, eh? The Freedom Guard side has Suicide Bombers that will have a similar effect.

Mobile Repair Vehicle & **Medic**: Units that can go out and repair vehicles or treat injured troopers in the field without having to return them to a repair facility/hospital. Units with low tenacity levels will have low tolerance of pain and will be quick to call for help; the repair/medic units can be set to respond to such calls automatically.

Saboteur: Perhaps not a very good combat unit, the Saboteur can be deadly when released against an enemy's base, where it will run amongst the buildings bringing their effectiveness down by as much as 50%.

Scout: A lone figure with an extended line-of-sight, the scout can "morph" into inanimate objects like rocks or trees. While morphed, the Scout can move, but not shoot. So if you see boulder–especially a moving one–in a field you had blasted flat five minutes ago, be suspicious… *very* suspicious.

Sniper: Like the Scout, the Sniper can morph into a tree or rock; in this form he can shoot but not move. The only indication you'll have is a possible muzzle flash of the Sniper's weapon.

Spy: The spy unit can morph into an enemy unit type and sneak onto the enemy's base to copy the plans for his buildings. This means that as a Freedom Guard player you'll be able to get the plans to Imperium structures, which you can then build on your own base

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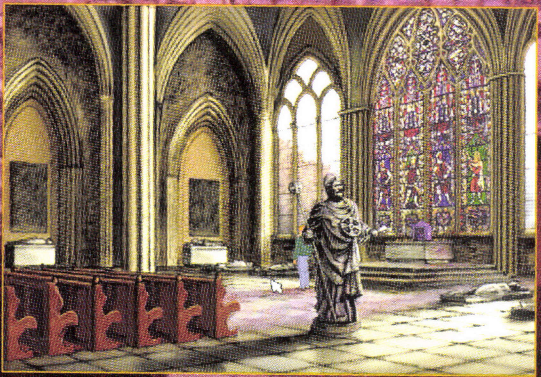

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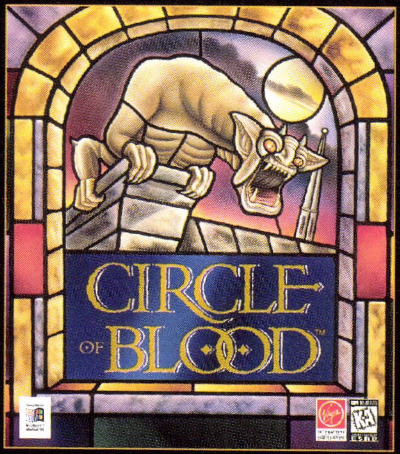

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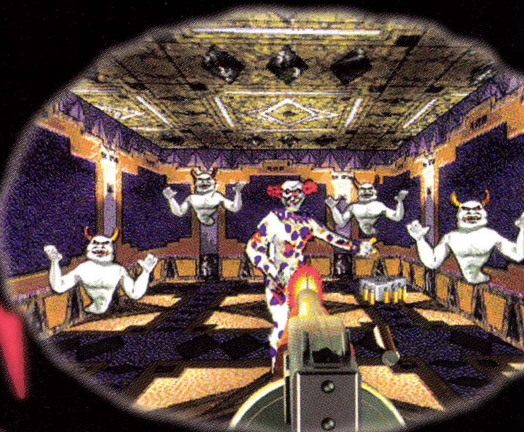

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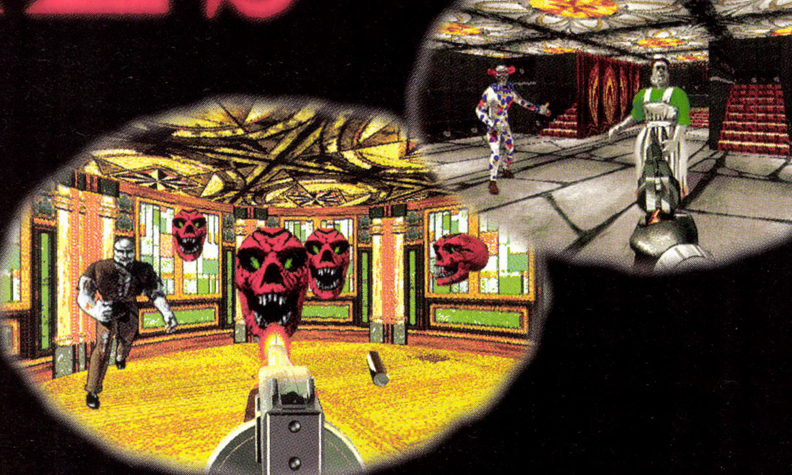

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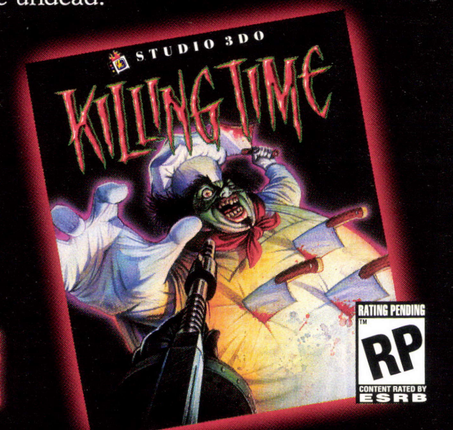
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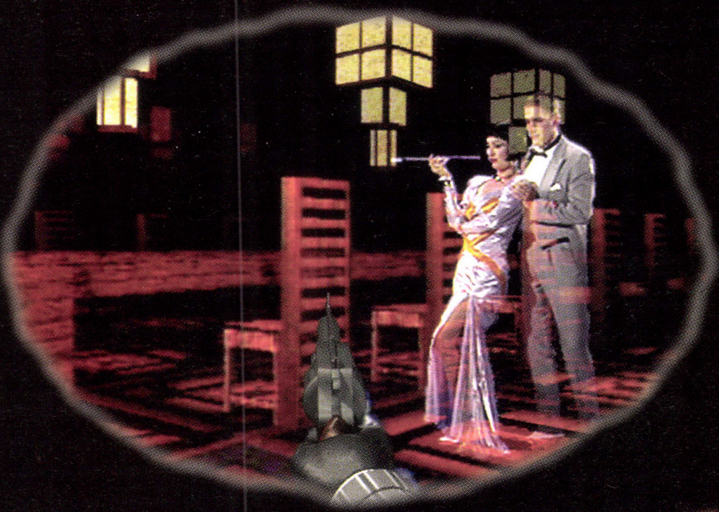

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STUDIO 3DO

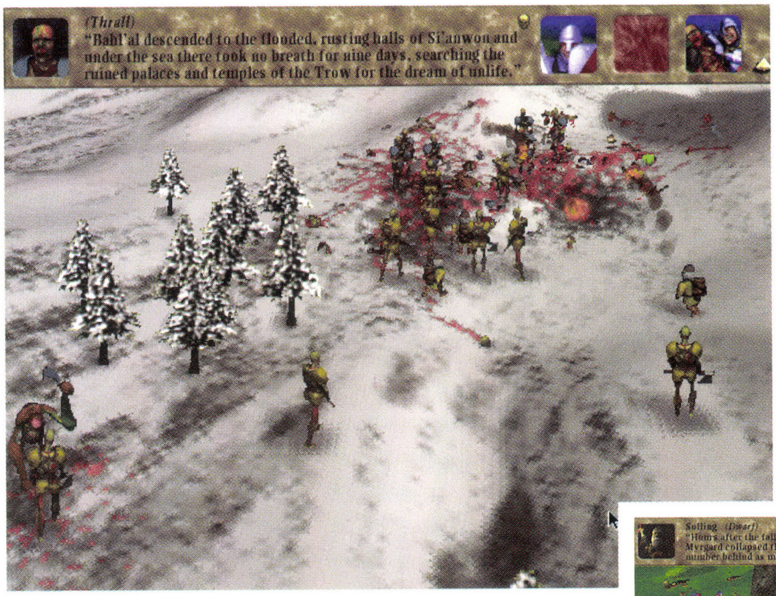
by Scott Udell

Myth

Bungie leaps into real-time strategy gaming in a big way

Bungie… a name oft ignored by the PC-based gaming community. "Oh yeah, those guys who make *Doom* clones for the Mac." Mac gamers have been wondering what the *Marathon* team has been up to, and PC gamers have hardly even thought about it; a mistake, indeed. Bungie recently visited the *CGS+* offices to show us the fruits of their secret project, a project called *Myth*. *Myth*… such a simple sounding name, (and only a working title) for a game which promises the next leap in technology for real-time strategy gaming.

The story behind *Myth* is a fairly straight-forward one of good vs. evil. The world portrayed is a circular one; the savior of humanity in one age returns in the next as its destroyer; guess which turn of the cycle it is this time? You command forces of good against the forces of evil and his undead minions, trying to save humanity from ultimate destruction in this cycle. Gameplay focuses almost entirely on combat; there is no resource management as in *Command & Conquer* or *Warcraft II*, nor even the unit building of *Z*. Instead, you'll start out a scenario with the forces (and occasionally objects) you need deployed on the map.



(Thrall)
"Bahl'al descended to the flooded, rusting halls of Si'anwon and under the sea there took no breath for nine days, searching the ruined palaces and temples of the Trow for the dream of unlife."

◄ *Battling Undead forces in the snowy wastes*

So far you're probably saying "Yeah, so? Just another *Warcraft* clone…" Well, partly true… but what if you could play *C&C* or *Warcraft II* in a fully dynamic 3D world where you could zoom in and out, fly about the battlefield, rotate around specific characters? Imagine a 3D game engine as involved as something from Bullfrog. Imagine, in fact, a combination of *Warcraft II* and *Magic Carpet 2* and you begin to get an inkling of the kind of game *Myth* promises to be (in fact already is, even in alpha, as Bungie's demonstration to us proved).

The 3D element of the game is notable for both its eye-candy/technology factor and for its effect on gameplay. Technologically, the game world is fully dynamic; *everything* is tracked in 3D space in the game, down to the smallest body part or bit of scrap. The terrain is built upon a 3D mesh map which the engine can alter in real time as needed; you can actually see the ground *ripple* from the force, say, of multiple explosions in a concentrated area.

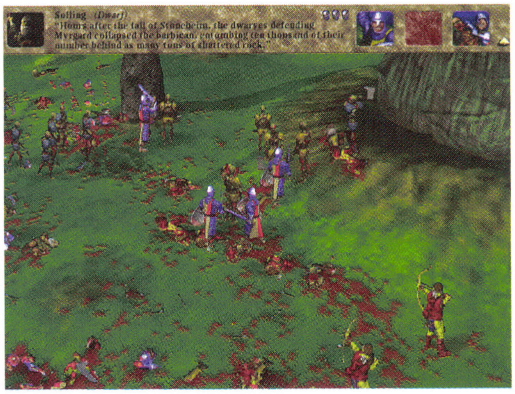
So while all of this is chewing up processor time, what is it doing for gameplay? Plenty, as your troops on the battlefield have to fight in this 3D world. Most simply, terrain can be used to mask an attack; our favorite was deep water: undead creatures, who don't need to breathe, can walk along the bottom of rivers or lakes unseen, popping up quite unexpectedly behind your lines. The realistic physics mean troops with ranged fire capabilities have an advantage when working from high ground and a disadvantage from low spots, but they also mean movement is complicated; while some units are nimble, those heavily armored knights just don't deal well with steep slopes. Even the dynamic objects play a part, as shrapnel being strewn about the battlefield can cause almost as much damage as direct combat.

Taking a page from the *Quake* book o' gaming, Bungie also plans on implementing a complete scripting system for the game, using the popular Java script system. While the scripting will be a great tool for the busy solitaire gamer working through the campaign, it'll really come into its own for multiplayer gaming; gamers will be able to use the script to control or customize almost every part of the game.

The game is being designed from the start with full multiplayer, multiplatform support. There'll be cross-platform support using TCP/IP and IPX, and Internet play options galore. In addition to working with the for-fee game services like TEN, M-player, and DWANGO, Bungie will be bundling *Myth* server software in each package so gamers can set up their own servers.

So what kind of hardware will you need for *Myth*; a small Cray or something? We saw it running on a 200MHZ Pentium, and it was pretty smooth, but that was non-optimized alpha code without any graphical or multimedia hardware acceleration. Bungie promised us 640x480 16 bit graphics on a non-accelerated Pentium or Power PC. On the PC side the game will include optimization for MMX Pentiums (whenever they ship) and will be Direct3D enabled.

▼ *Myth's field of battle is extremely dynamic*



Solling (Dwarf)
"Hours after the fall of Stoneheim, the dwarves defending Myrgard collapsed the barbican, entombing ten thousand of their number behind as many tons of shattered rock."

All this only scratches the surface of *Myth* (and what Bungie showed us was still *early* code), which is due out early to mid '97. Keep an eye on the pages of *CGS+* as we can guarantee you that we'll be bringing you more on this one in the very near future. ■

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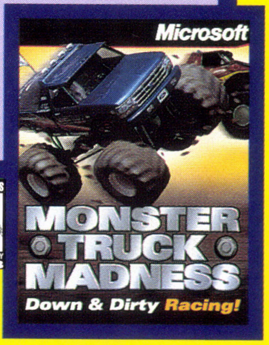

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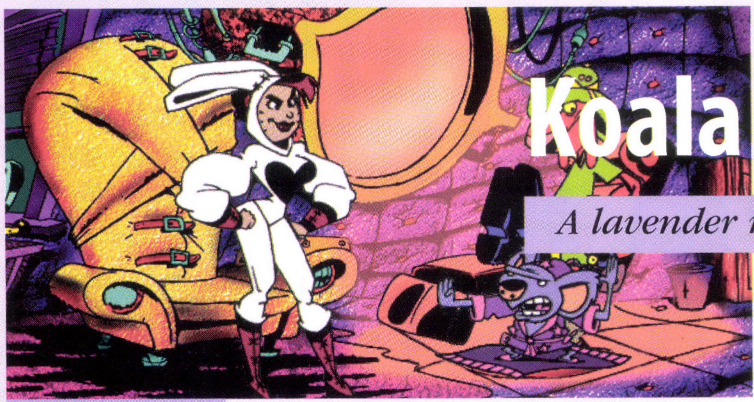
by Cindy Yans

Koala Lumpur Journey to the Edge

A lavender marsupial doffs his fez to the masses



▲ *Famous chairs of the psychotic and depressed*

Broderbund's first release of 1997 is certainly not akin to its usual fare. Billed as "a comic adventure with attitude," *Koala Lumpur* pulls into the station with a market share of laffs (and some laughs as well) and perhaps the first marsupial hero ever to hit multimedia entertainment.

It started close to three years ago, when an animator at (Colossal) Pictures approached Broderbund with an idea which he originally intended as a cartoon for Nickelodeon. Did Jamie Baker wake up one morning with a purple koala bear snoring on the neighboring pillow? Did this bear wear a fez, speak with an east Indian accent and expound upon transcendental philosophy? Was the Australian animator experiencing flashbacks from the sixties? Or is Koala real? He must have been real enough to Baker who, along with Broderbund staple Tom Rettig, shaped this perhaps initially nebulous creature into the stalwart and spiritual bear we see today.

Developed jointly with San Francisco-based (Colossal) Pictures, *Koala* sports a team of over 20 (Colossal) artists who, along with some animators from StarToons, have created a group of wonderfully rendered and zany characters. With the help of writer John Morgan, these loonies just *ooze* irreverence in all areas from testicle humor to politics.

The mystic marsupial Zen Master Koala Lumpur, who is permanently stitched to his flying carpet, has mistakenly uttered an incantation which will bring about the disaster of disasters — the Comedy Apocalypse. This cataclysmic event will bring joy to the evil Macho (who sounds as though he has been voice-coached by Oz-the-Great-and-Powerful) but will ultimately threaten the entire universe. Ella Mental, the velvet-voiced deity, informs Koala that he will be able to avoid the Apocalypse by finding and reassembling the pieces of the Lost Scroll of Cartoon Prophecies which have been scattered throughout several worlds.

Koala conjures a familiar, which instead of something proper like a black cat or mongoose, turns out to be a goofy-looking housefly with a vacant expression and toothy grin. That would be you (and you thought you would get to play Koala...). You, as Fly, also happen to be the cursor; everywhere you point whoever is with you follows along. You and Koala eventually find Koala's old friend Dr. Dingo Tu-Far (or maybe he did), and the three of you go scavenging for scroll shards.

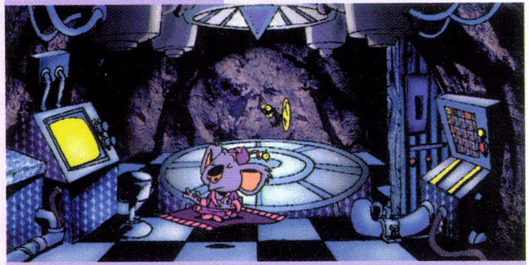
After three months of casting for the role of Koala, it turns out that the original "temporary concept voice" of Phil Robinson had so clearly defined the character that no one among the hordes of hopefuls even came close. So much for another lesson of, "if it ain't broke,..." Dr. Dingo, we're told, is played by the person after whom the character was originally modeled, although we're also told he wouldn't be terribly happy if he knew that's what people think of him. He does, however, do wonders with lines such as, "I'm so hungry I could suck the crust of a warthog's bum." Doesn't *that* conjure up a lovely picture?

You travel in Koala's vehicle of choice, the even-more-purple-than-he TTRV, to some rather diverse places. In The Land of Lost Things, amid wrenches and old socks, the thing that may become *most* lost is you. But successful navigation and the mastering of dogspeak will lead you to the throne room of Woody Knot (or *would* he?) and his legendary all-seeing helmet. Woody, a ventriloquist dummy and old acquaintance of Koala, was once the talk of Vegas and resembles Chucky of the *Child's Play* trilogy.

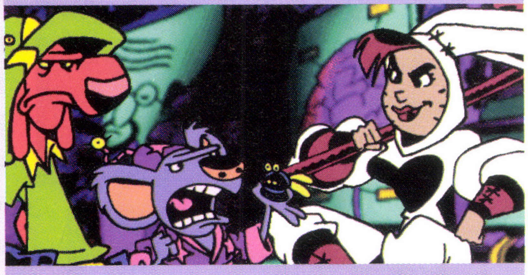
The Stream of Consciousness is a surrealistic theme-park in which you find Tuff-Luv, the dominatrix turned psychotherapist in a bunny suit who happens to know a *little* bit more than most about tea and sympathy. You and Dingo undergo a whole barrage of psyche calisthenics before emerging from *this* funhouse.

Annie Body is six years old, but jump rope and Kindergarten are not her thing; instead, she's mastered cold fusion, and has built her own space station, replete with robotic companions. Desperate, sadistic (for a six-year-old) and lonely, Annie captures your little party, and then it becomes time for a party of her own. In this Eye in the Sky world, it's time to convince Annie that just because she's smarter than all three of you put together, it doesn't mean she can *keep* you.

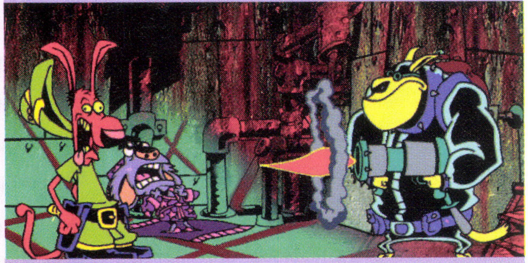
Teeming with pop and not-so-pop culture references, from *Gilligan's Island* to *Spartacus*, *Koala Lumpur* offers a tongue in cheek adventure which is *not* for the whole family. Be there to reassure, when Koala says in his charming Indian accent, "You're scaring the brown yogurt right out of my person." ■



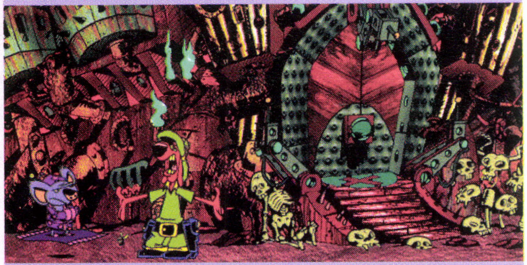
▲ *The crazed housefly is you*



▲ *Do not be using that mallet for non-spiritual purposes, oh floppy-eared babe*



▲ *Was it something you said?*



▲ *Dingo refuses to negotiate the skeletons*

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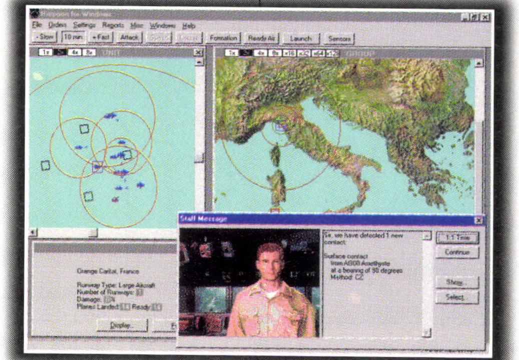
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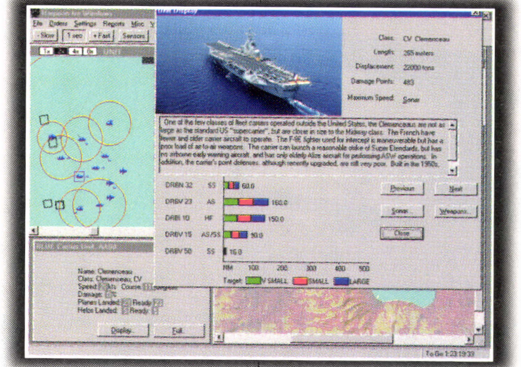

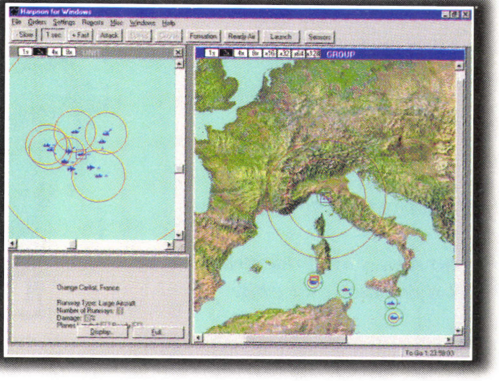
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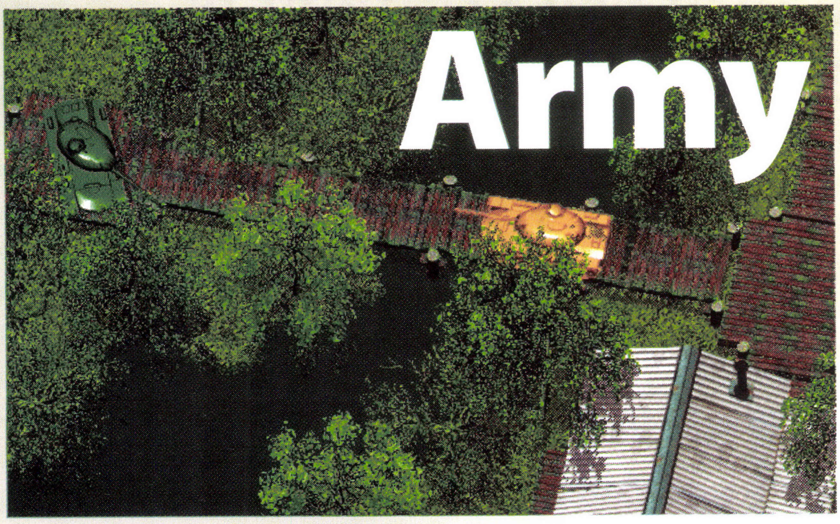
Army Men

The wonderful world of plastic



▲ *An example of the bayou terrain. Note the varying terrain levels (i.e. the trees are above the tanks)*

Place this squarely in the "why didn't someone think of that before" file. 3DO is bringing back one of the highlights of every childhood with their real-time action/strategy game, *Army Men*. You are the field commander of the Green or Tan army, controlling individual units and vehicles as they rumble across the countryside. It eschews the resource building of a *Command & Conquer*, making it closer to a more strategic version of *Return Fire* or an even more action-oriented *Z*.

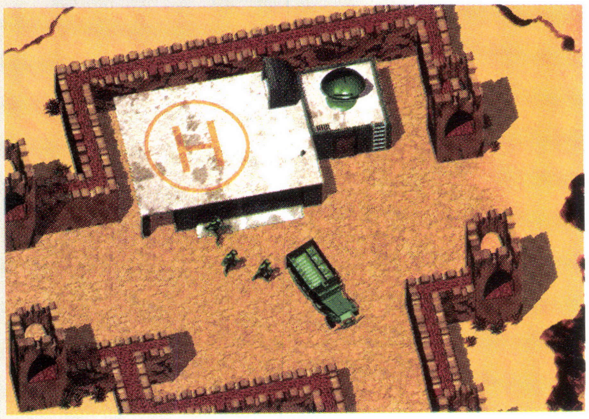
Basically, the game plunks two players down on a map at opposite ends; they then try to eliminate each other. From your base, you load up your Command Vehicle with your units and then send them out to battle. You command and deploy additional units in an attempt to take over the opponent's base. That opponent can be one of four computer players (geared toward specific attack patterns, such as ground, air and sea) or another human via LAN, modem or split-screen. Options are planned to increase the level of strategy in the game, such as allowing for friendly fire, determining whether or not vehicles can destroy the opposing base and setting the number of units as limited or unlimited (after they die, they regenerate at your base).

You control six command vehicles, including such favorites as Personnel and Attack Helicopters, Tanks, Half Tracks, Jeeps and Gunboats. Like *Return Fire*, you actually drive the units around the map. The unit types should also be flashback-inducing, with Light and Heavy Infantry, Commandos, Engineers, Artillery and Anti-Aircraft units. They will mount the usual complement of weapons all warmongering kids had at their disposal, such as machine guns, bombs, missiles and flame-throwers. In keeping with the plastic theme, flame throwers will melt units; you can also shoot pieces off of units and vehicles.

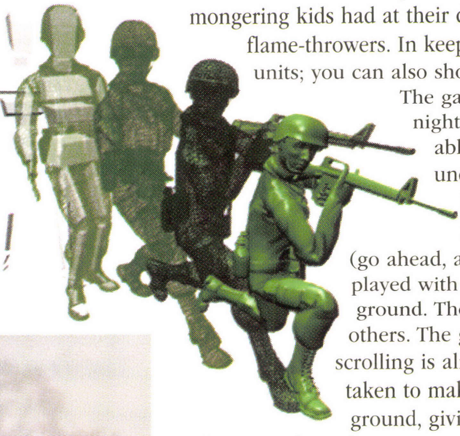
The game will ship with five map types, with day and night missions on each. Fifteen levels of terrain are available; mountains can be climbed, and you can drive under certain objects. The terrain types include desert, bayou, tropical, arctic and a Mayberry-style town. Here's a vote for bedroom, driveway, enormous hole (go ahead, admit it – you dug a big hole in your back yard and played with your army men in it) and perhaps school playground. The view is isometric, though a bit more overhead than others. The graphics are rendered, and look quite sharp (and the scrolling is already fast and smooth), with special care being taken to make sure that the units stand out from the background, giving the game a real fake look (ah, the advantage of playing with toys).

Studio 3DO is utilizing the modeling program *Bones Pro* to create realistic movement of the soldiers, while retaining their essential visual plastic-ness (finally, rendered humans that are *supposed* to look shiny and perfect). The team assembled to bring this game to life features a motley crew of ex-Electronic Arts staffers, whose titles range from *NHL 96* and the various *Strike* games (*Jungle*, *Soviet*, *Urban*) to *Centurion* and *Road Rash*.

The only problem with the design is that it doesn't allow you to burn your plastic heroes into enormous multi-colored balls with a blow torch, or launch them across the yard with cherry bombs and firecrackers. But who knows; the game won't be out until Spring of 1997, which will give the designers plenty of time to turn those analog childhood fantasies into digital code. ■

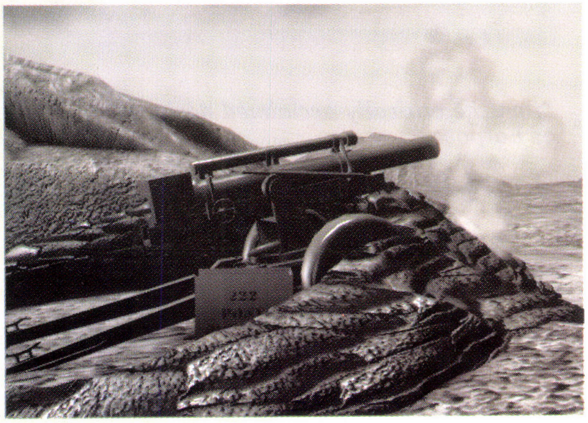


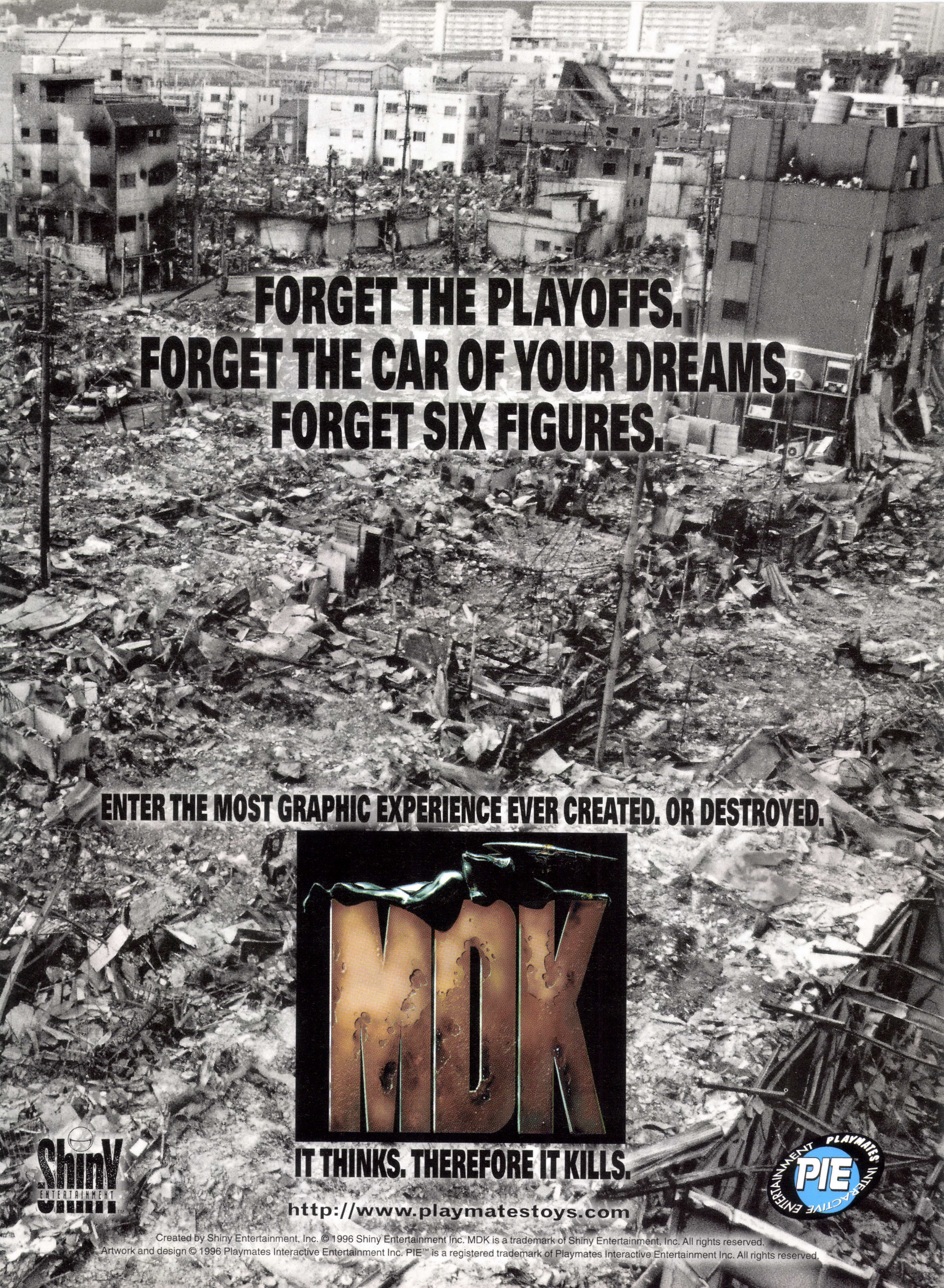
▲ *Your troops hopping on your Command Vehicle*



▶ *The rendering package BonesPro allows you to start with a skeletal model and work your way to a full rendered plastic tool of death*

▼ *The cut scenes are presented in newsreel-style black and white*

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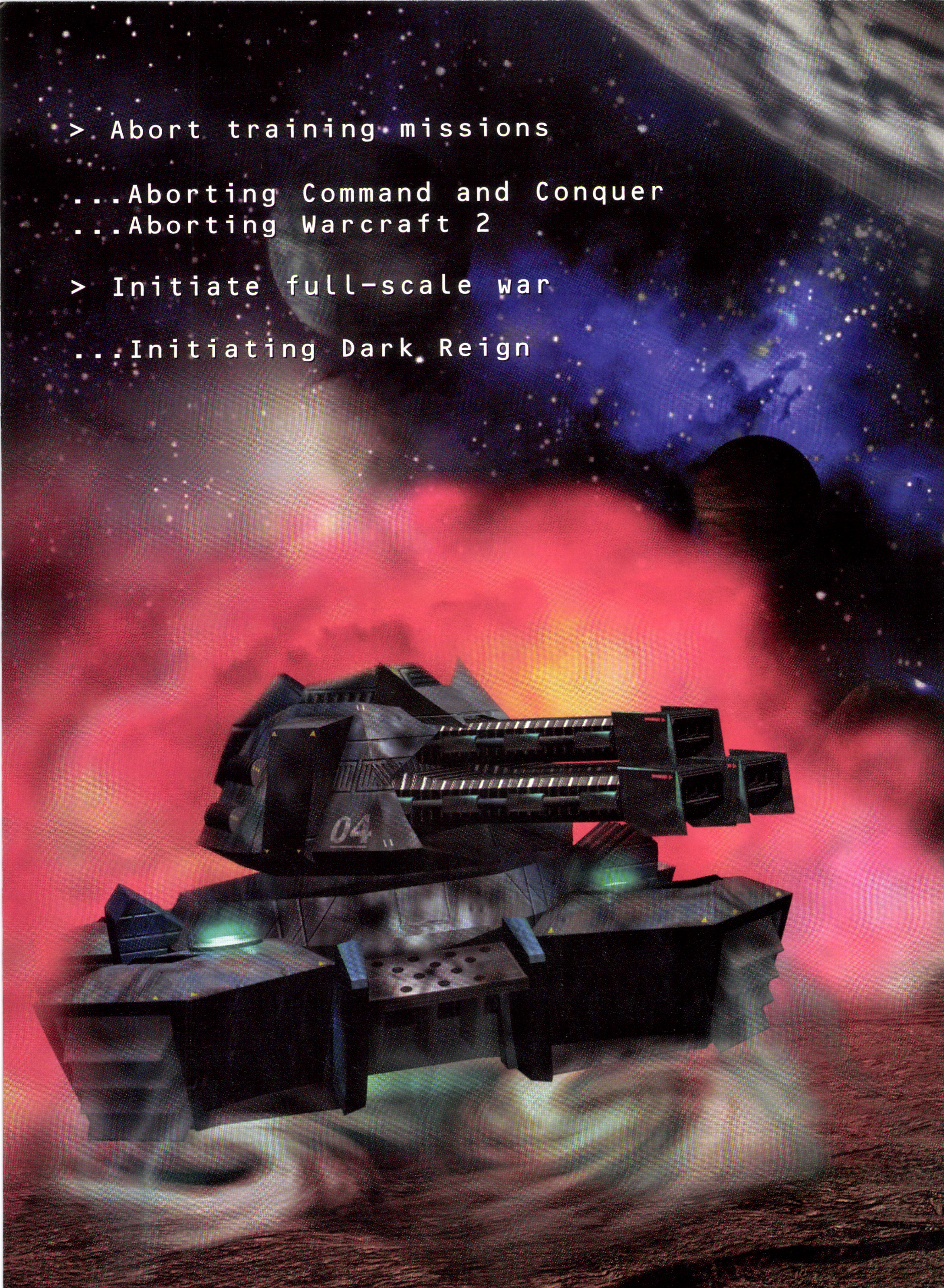
> Abort training missions
...Aborting Command and Conquer
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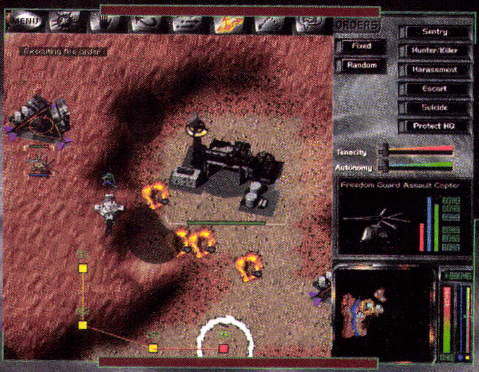
> Initiate full-scale war
...Initiating Dark Reign
04


MENU
ORDERS
Executing this order
Fixed
Random
Sentry
Hunter-Killer
Harassment
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Tenacity
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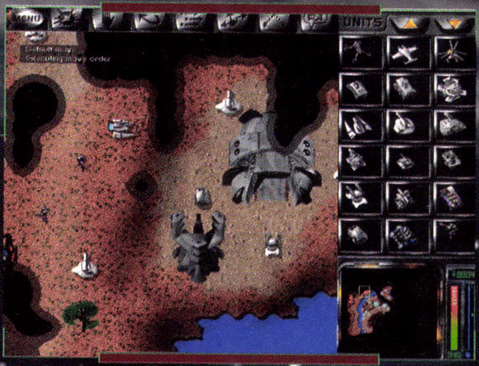
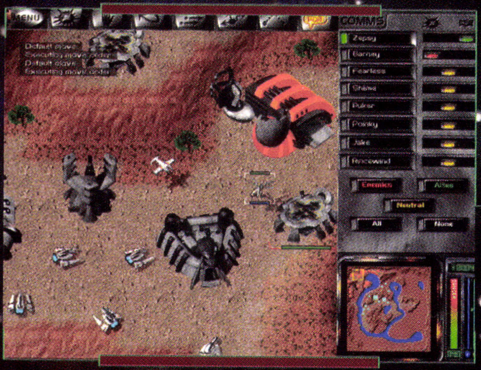

MENU
UNITS
Executing move order

> Battleground Realism

Sighting and attack calculations take into account true line-of-sight. Realistically modeled terrain dynamically affects unit movement. Terrain deforms when hit with weapon fire.


MENU
COMMS
Default move
Executing move order
Default move
Executing move order
Zepay
Barney
Fearless
Shiwa
Pulsar
Pointy
Jake
Rincewind
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Neutral
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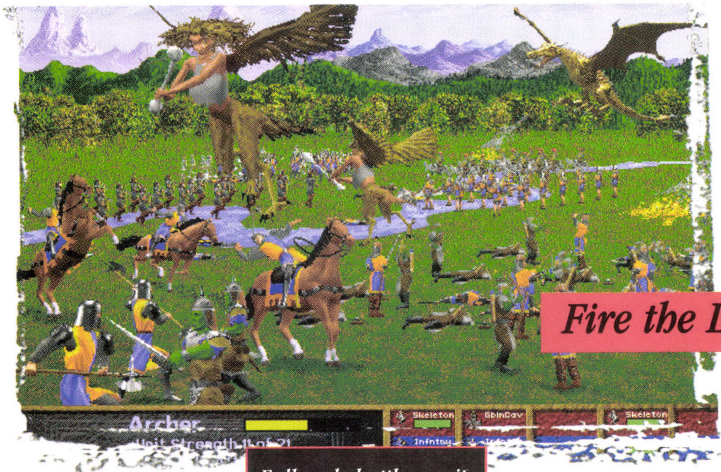
by Cindy Yans

Birthright

The Gorgon's Alliance

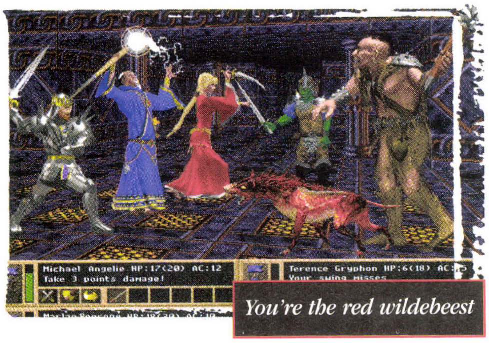
Fire the DM and toss the dice out the window



Full scale battle awaits in real-time or with customized delay

TSR has been doling out *AD&D* licenses for quite a while now, and yet another marriage is in the works. *Birthright*, TSR's traditional dice rolling, pencil and paper toting, dungeon master supervised, role-playing game is being Sierra-ized.

Sierra's multimedia PC version pirouettes onto the scene as *Birthright: the Gorgon's Alliance*. The storyline deifies bloodline as the underlying factor determining the dearth or providence of the land. "When a ruler dies, the land suffers. When a prince is born, the land blooms." In the background story, bloodlines were created when the heroes of the Battle of Mount Deismaar were zapped with an overdose of Divine Intervention. Each received a particular set of powers and abilities, of which his or her heritage is comprised. These qualities may be physical, mental, active or passive, and may include thievery, magic or the art of stain removal. Strength of character is also dictated by the pre-fab bloodline, but as rumor goes, it is not immune to theft.


Michael Angelie HP:17(20) AC:12
Take 3 points damage!
Terence Gryphon HP:6(18) AC:
Your swing misses

You're the red wildebeest

Players are in charge of their own well-being, as well as the health of an entire kingdom. The ultimate goal is to gain sufficient power to be named Emperor of Anuire. This can be accomplished through chivalrous conquests, clever alliances and careful resource management. Sounds suspiciously like a strategy game...which is no accident. TSR designers Rich Baker and Colin McComb made a commitment to fashioning a new direction for RPGs. They feel that it is time to transcend the tradition of the single, self-created character to provide fantasy gaming on a more epic scale. "We created *Birthright* in response to requests from gamers that wanted more empire building and large-scale battles," says Baker. "In that sense, *Birthright* is a combination of a traditional role-playing game and a strategy/war game." Step right up. See the genre boundaries become even murkier…not that this is always Bad Thing; a masterpiece is just that, so who cares about its labels? Of course, the biggest risk here is the lack of *enough* elements to satisfy any one gamer's particular passion.

Freeze! Keep your hands in the air

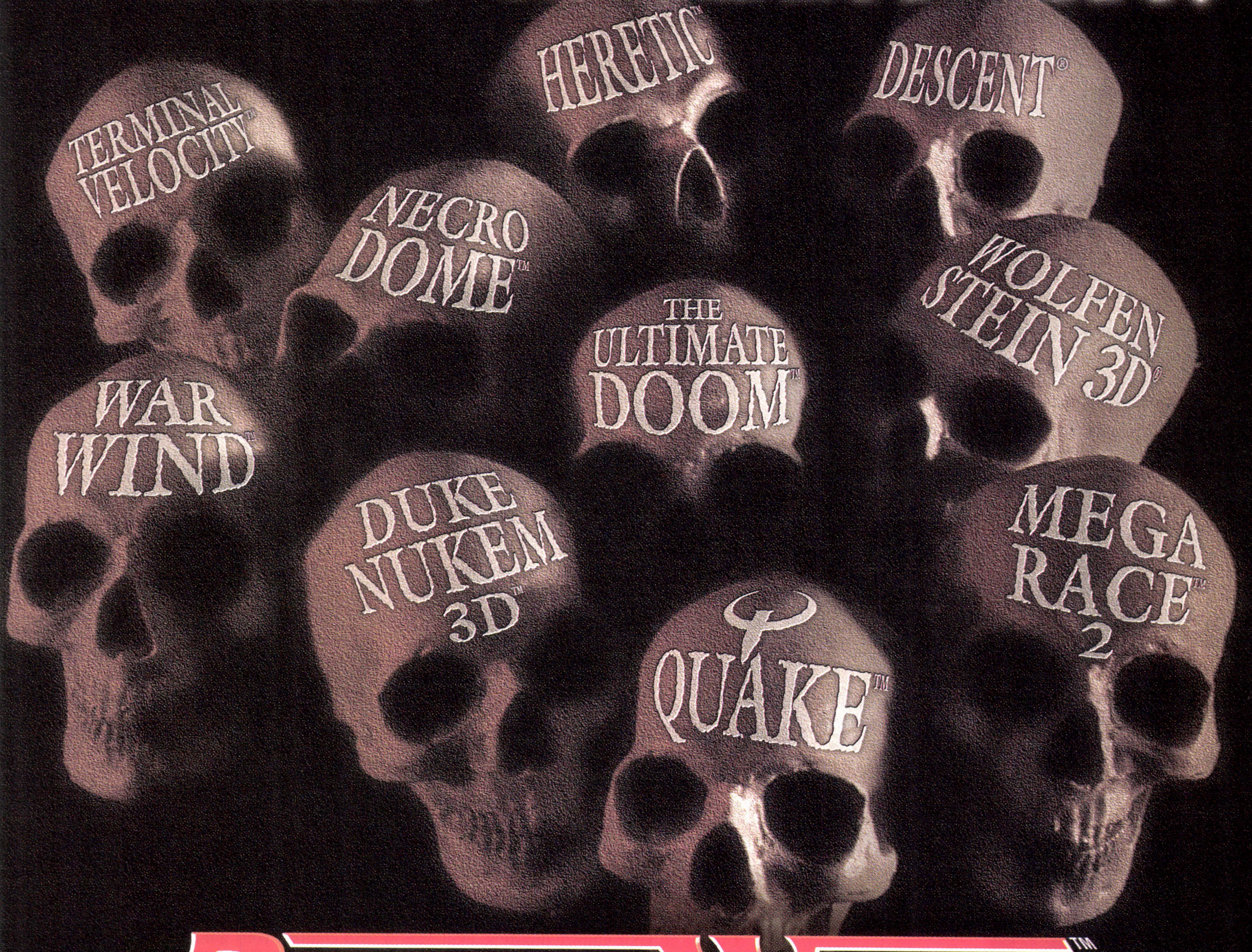
In assessing the game's design, what is obvious is that a lot of attention has been paid to the issue of replayability. You begin the game having descended from one of the aforementioned royal bloodlines, and are given one of 17 possible kingdoms to rule. Each kingdom is unique in its resources and opportunities for adventure, and will exist within any one of eight different realms. Players will choose among 34 different characters of up to two sexes, each with hundreds of individual characteristics. You can be a warrior, priest, wizard, general, enchantress, business baron or thief. Delay between actions can be tailored in both army and individual combat sequences, allowing either a leisurely-paced/RPG structured game, or a game in fast action real-time. When you add these features *and* the ability to approach each situation in at least four or five different ways *and* the opportunity for LAN, Internet and modem connections, it seems apparent there just might be a *few* different experiences possible. And with the dollars we shell out for games these days, it's nice to think one or two might possibly contain enough diversity to warrant a rematch.

Take this question mark, oh wretched mage

Many of the developers have been playing *AD&D* since they were kids, back in the days when *AD&D* was supposed to turn you into some kind of maladjusted social pariah or possible serial killer. Are they still saying these things about *AD&D*-ers? If so, perhaps the developers are responsible... especially if anyone caught Alan Clark, vice president of R&D for *Birthright* and Mike Ormsby (a Sierra game designer) suiting up in some armor and heading out to the vacant lot nearby for a mock battle. "We just wanted to feel what it was like to get struck by a mace or a sword..." I can think of any number of refugees from the criminal justice system who would like very much to show them. With the integrity of *Birthright*'s 3-D real-time battle sequences at stake, though, I guess we can give these folks a break.

In a departure from across-the-table play, the computer acts as dungeon master, taking care of all of the usually associated paperwork and math. The aim here is to give the *AD&D* player a full-scale, immersive experience without a calculator, graphite, wood and rubber. Of course, if the player chooses to *wear* rubber while playing, there is nothing to be done about that. Parry, oh latex one. ■

DEATH'S GREATEST HITS!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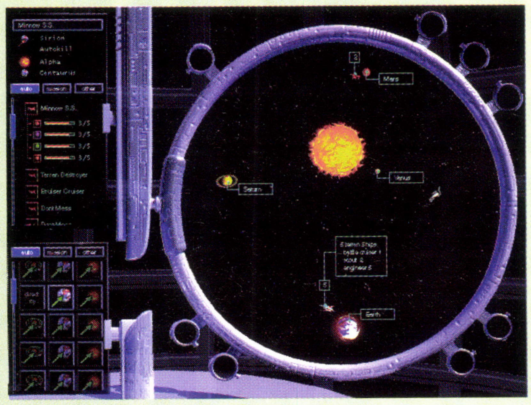
by Scott Udell

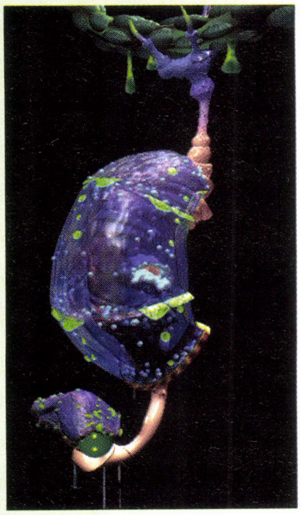
Galactic Conquest

Portal of Succession

Another attempt to boldly go where everyone's been before… or have they?



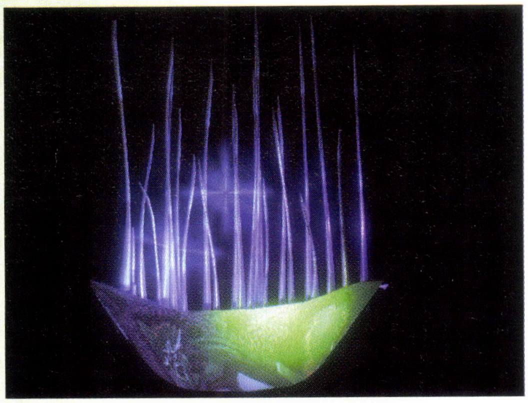
▲ *An early look at your "hub in space," your gameplay "central HQ"*



▲ *A T'ganth, the chitinous insectoids with the irritating tapping habits*

◀ *A member of the Ptash, "very cautious, emotionally unstable, cephlopodic metamorphs"*

▼ *The Dax Wall relic; when paired with another Wall relic in another ship creates a barrier between the two ships that no enemy ships can pass through*



From the title alone, you're probably thinking "Oh no! Another *Master of Orion* clone!" On the surface, you'd be right, as 3DO's *Galactic Conquest* does indeed have galactic empire building as part of its gameplay (a really big part, actually). But, from what 3DO has told us, it will also encompass the detailed multi-species interactions of *Star Control 3* (no mean feat; it'll be interesting to see if they can pull it off) and some gameplay twists that, built around the game's storyline as they are, are unique to *Galactic Conquest*.

The story forming the background to the game posits the Successor, "a god-like entity at the core of an isolated galaxy." The Successor will, upon contact with the Notifier (which you try to be), acknowledge the end of the universe, saving only the members of the Notifier's race for transfer to the next universal iteration. Realizing that anyone who figures this progression out is likely to try to present themselves as the Notifier, a group of successor-followers named themselves "Protectors," and have safely sealed off the Successor (and, conveniently, themselves), leaving only a single portal and a hidden key with which to operate it. This key is the focus of gameplay, as all your galactic exploration, development, and conquest activities revolve around getting the key and getting to the next universal cycle.

At the game's start, you'll be able to choose which species to play (you can choose from five of the thirteen available), with all the strengths and weaknesses each race will have; to put you in the mood for your race, even the visual look of the various screens and ships will change (although 3DO assures us that the user interface will remain the same throughout). From your central "hub in space" (the main control screen) you'll be able to disperse your forces at the turn-based strategic level or control your ships in real-time tactical battles. Each game will have some 50 solar systems, with 200 random planets and associated "space phenomena," like cosmic storms and everybody's favorite, black holes.

Battle, exploration, and diplomacy are your key activities in the game; while resources exist, you'll start out a universe fully loaded up (*i.e.*, resource management really doesn't play a part). When you do actually have to fight it out you can drop into the complex real-time 3D battle mode (whew!) or choose to let the computer fight your tactical battles for you. 3DO claims there will be "thousands of possible ship design combinations," and says there will be over 60 unique alien artifacts which may make an appearance in a particular universe.

During all your empire building, exploration, and combat, your goal is still to find the hidden key to the Portal. Once you've found the key, your sole goal is to get it (and, we presume, your galactic imperial self) safely to the Portal so you can pass on to the next universe where, if we understand 3DO correctly, you'll start the whole process over again, with new worlds, a different mix of species, and tougher challenges. As you progress, for example, the key gets smarter, moving like a ship through space, jumping out of your ship if it feels "endangered," or even sending a message to all the other players, letting them know that you have it. Similarly, the Portal is hidden in later levels, and you must use the key to find it (using the old "getting hot, getting cold" methodology); eventually, you'll encounter the Successor fleet, awaiting within the Portal for one last, massive battle (somewhat akin to the Guardian of Orion in *MOO*).

In some levels you may be required to cooperate with other races to win; apparently, races may repeat in new universes as well (3DO was pretty vague on this feature; how exactly it fits into the fiction of the game is unclear). What *is* clear is that the computer players will have memories; they'll remember your tactical style and how you treated them in diplomatic realms, and react accordingly. In fact, this "memory" will not only last from universe to universe in one game session, it will also be a record kept by the computer from game to game, so the next time you boot up, the T'ganth might already be ill disposed towards you (don't worry folks; this will be a "purgeable" feature like those Top Ten Score lists in other games). Of course, multi-player options abound for those who prefer the satisfaction of double-dealing a human opponent.

If all goes as planned, we should be scrambling for that dratted key by mid-'97 on Windows 95-equipped machines. Until then, I think I'll try to see if the hardware store can grind me a new key… ■

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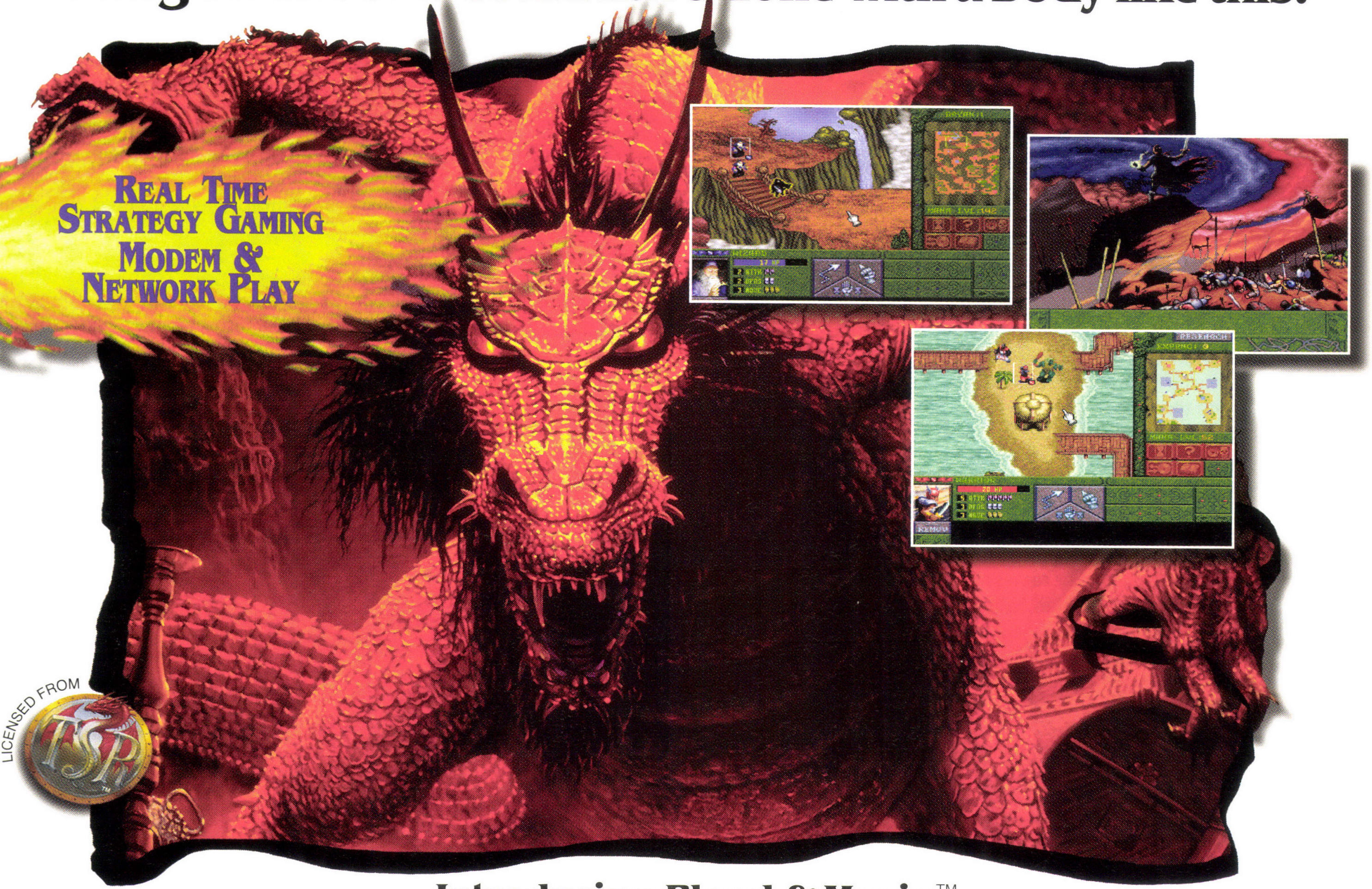

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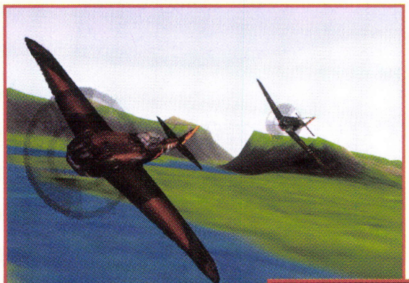
missing in action?

the mission is still on for confirmed kill

Confirmed Kill was scheduled to arrive forBeta testing in the August-September time frame. This multi-player WWII flight sim has been *en route* ever since the ICI/Domark split. ICI launched *Warbirds* and Domark (now Eidos) kept the *Confirmed Kill* name and started programming. A quick call to sources at Eidos Interactive resulted in an updated flight plan. The mission is still on.

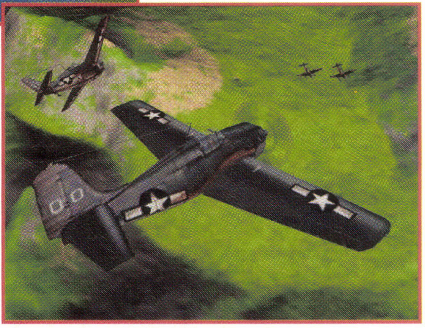
The big question is, "When?" The answer, of course, is "When Eidos feels it is ready." The tentative estimate for a public beta is January '97. There are many reasons for the long development period. Primarily, Eidos wants to ensure that the game is a fully polished product before release. All of us are familiar with the work-in-progress characteristics of other on-line air combat sims. The developers plan to take the time to do it right and roll out an "on-line flight sim with boxed game polish." Secondly, Eidos is simultaneously developing two other flight sims, *Flying Nightmares 2* and an Apache AH-64A game. As new technology becomes available from these simulations, it is incorporated into the older *Confirmed Kill* project.

Constructing the flight models is a time consuming task. Over 450 parameters, counting the gunnery and damage models, must be entered for each aircraft type. Basic information such as weights and dimensions, measurements of thrust lines, prop dimensions and much more are defined. Results from flight and engine test charts must be interpreted. When the equations are complete, the flight model is "flown" to see if it hits the historically charted performance. If it doesn't, the tweaking begins



▲ Confirmed Kill will eventually provide 5 Soviet aircraft, types normally ignored by other on-line air combat games. Here a La-7 tries to run from a FW-190

▼ A pair of F4F Wildcats roll in on two unsuspecting Stukas. Should be easy kills if the right tactics are used



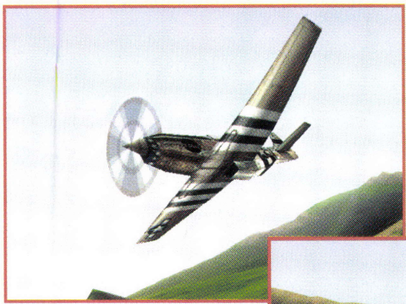
Plans are to have thirteen basic airframes available when the software finally takes off. Another nine airframes will be sequenced in later. Counting the various models individually, there are twenty-seven planned aircraft. For example, the Bf-109G and the Bf-109K count as two aircraft. The plane set should eventually consist of the following aircraft:

Allied Aircraft: initially the P-51D Mustang, F6F3/5 Hellcat, Spitfire MK. V/IX, F4F Wildcat, F4U-1D Corsair and the P-38J Lightning with the P51-H, P-47N Thunderbolt, Spitfire MK. XVI, SBD Dauntless and TBM Avenger as follow-ons.

German Aircraft: Bf-109G/K, JU-87G2 Stuka, the FW-190A5 and FW-190D9, all in the initial release.

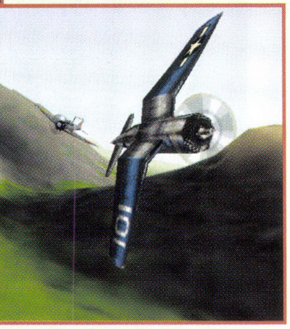
Japanese Aircraft: initially only the A6M5 Zero, followed by the Ki-84 Frank, Kate, and Val.

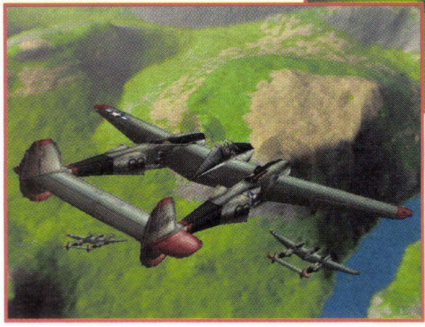
Russian Aircraft: the IL-10 Sturmovik and LA-5/7 with the Yak 3/9 sequenced in later.



▲ The P-51D Mustang is always a favorite and will be in the initial plane set. It's fast, good looking and deadly if used correctly

▼ This bold Zero is engaging two F4U Corsairs. Not recommended unless you can make quick kills





◄ Pack-hunting P-38's. It's always a smart idea to fly with wingmen; you live a lot longer. Squadrons will undoubtedly form quickly in Confirmed Kill

This is an extensive plane set, which should allow many great historically accurate match-ups.

It should be quite easy to arrange these fights. Eidos has developed a simple Player Lobby interface which will let you meet and sort allies and opponents by Name, Squadron, Ranking and Connection Quality. Imagine setting up and launching a 64 v 64 historically accurate mission with a few quick mouse clicks! Players can choose quickly from dozens of historically correct, play balanced scenarios, from the Battle of Kursk to Midway. The mission planner allows you to design and save your own scenarios, too.

This play environment is a significant departure from the "persistent environment" of *Warbirds* or *Air Warrior*. In those games, you are essentially and continuously at the mercy of anyone who took off 15 minutes before you did. If he simply climbs, he'll have a huge energy advantage whenever he meets you. With any skill at all, he'll convert you into a quick kill. Even without skill, his energy ensures the ability to disengage before you get him in the pipper. If you've played these games and found yourself at the mercy of a high-flying FW-190, you'll know exactly what *Confirmed Kill* is trying to prevent. Here, you agree upon terms mutually, before the fight begins. You may start with an advantage, disadvantage or essentially equal. No longer will the amount of money spent climbing determine the outcome of an engagement. Piloting skills will be far more important.

Money is an important issue here. Many fearless on-line fighter pilots have broken into a cold sweat when they've opened their monthly VISA bill. On-line air combat is addictive, and charges of $300/month are not unusual. With *Confirmed Kill* running on Total Entertainment Network, those days should be over. All the games on TEN are flat-rate priced at $30 per month for unlimited play.

Unlimited air combat for $30 per month? No wonder we're all eagerly awaiting this game's debut. *–john nolan* ■

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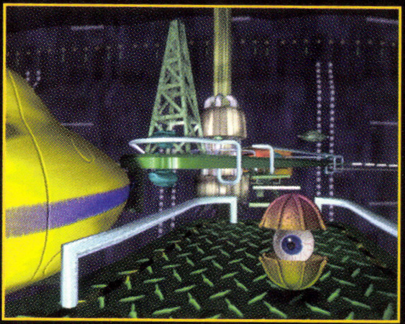

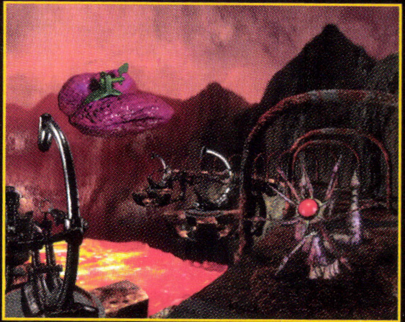

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meridian 59

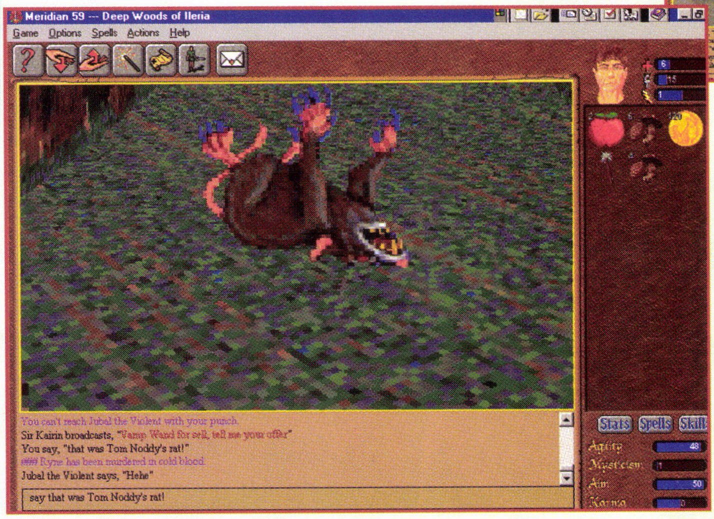
a step forward in online gaming

For years, the Internet has hosted Multi-User Dungeons, or MUDs, for short: text-based games resembling the Infocom classics of the mid 1980s, but with support for potentially hundreds of players. These games tend to emphasize role-playing rather than adventure, with character building and monster killing the primary activities. After noticing the character interaction possibilities and enduring popularity of MUDs, it was only a matter of time before game developers began producing graphical adaptations of this text-based phenomenon. Most fully graphical MUDs have opted for a top-down, Ultima-style view –mainly, you'd think, because a fully 3D environment would put a tremendous strain on servers. But in stark contrast to its competitors, Studio 3DO has recently introduced *Meridian 59*, a MUD featuring a *Doom*-style engine. Do the graphics make a difference? Yes, but for better or worse, beneath the surface *Meridian 59* is still a MUD at heart.

What, you may ask, is a typical MUD like? MUDs typically allow you to control a single character defined by a class (Fighter, Mage, Thief) and a battery of numerical statistics. Killing wandering monsters, your character gains levels and power, much like a character in a traditional role-playing game. Combat-oriented MUDs are devoted mainly to the pursuit of experience points and superior equipment, though conversation and personal interaction is also important for some players.

Some MUDs allow a full range of antisocial behavior, which typically appears in the form of thievery and Player Killing (PK). In theory, these elements should be easy to integrate into a game world. In practice, however, they are often disruptive, and they can cause socially oriented players to abandon the game. After all, it's hard to start up a good conversation when everyone you meet is only interested in robbing or killing you.

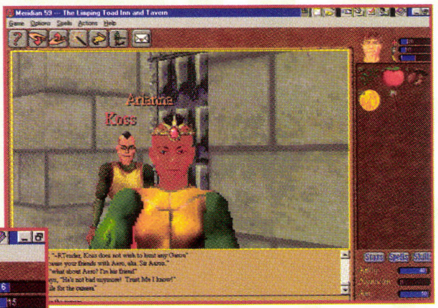
Meridian 59 retains most of these MUD conventions, adapting them to its 3D environment. The main departure from standard MUD fare is the lack of a class or level system. Your character doesn't actually gain levels, but he or she does enjoy incremental gains in six basic statistics as time goes on.



You can't reach Jubal the Violent with your punch.
Sir Kairin broadcasts, "Vamp Wand for sell, tell me your offer"
You say, "that was Tom Noddy's rat!"
Ryne has been murdered in cold blood
Jubal the Violent says, "Hehe"

say that was Tom Noddy's rat!

▼ **I have taken my vengeance upon the ignoble rat**

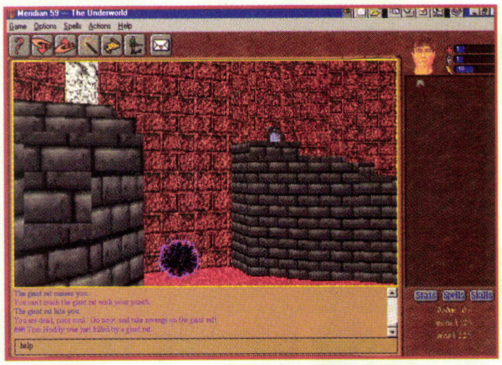


▲ **Red names designate Player Killers, and orange designates outlaws. Meridian 59 is a pretty lawless place**

Characters don't belong to any particular class, but they do have a set of skills which help define their persona. There are also Guilds to join in *Meridian 59*, which further define the role of your character.

The game's 3D environment is a lot like *Doom*, complete with Automap and a standard set of movement commands, but lacking the advanced features of later *Doom* clones (i.e. jumping, crouching, flying). Combat is not reflex-based, despite the *Doom*-like engine: you can hit any opponent within a certain range, and both monsters and characters move quite slowly, so great aim and fast reflexes aren't necessary. The 3D engine and graphics would be significantly sub-par for a single-player game, but they're acceptable in this multi-player environment. The ability to customize your character's appearance and even change his or her expression during the game is a welcome and creative addition.

The million-dollar question, of course, is how does *Meridian 59*, which costs a reasonable $10 per month (beyond the cost of the boxed starter kit), stack up against its absolutely free, but graphically challenged, Internet cousins? Without the graphics, *Meridian 59* would be a fairly run-of-the-mill MUD, complete with its fair share of undesirable elements: characters improve quite slowly, the world is standard fantasy fare, and both Player Killing and thievery seem to be slightly out of hand. The game world has the same "Get experience points, get better equipment, and ignore everyone else" feel as many combat MUDs on the Internet, even though the game interface, with its adjustable character expressions and diverse conversation options, would seem geared more toward socializing and interaction. This businesslike quality is probably a result of Player Killing and thievery, which inevitably drives off the most sociable players.



The giant rat misses you.
You can't reach the giant rat with your punch.
The giant rat hits you.
You are dead, poor soul. Go now, and take revenge on the giant rat!
Tom Noddy was just killed by a giant rat.

help

▲ **Drat, killed by a rat! Here's the psychedelic underworld**

However, the graphical element of *Meridian 59* puts it over the top, making it a worthwhile investment both for beginning MUDders and anyone frustrated with the lack of visual appeal in a typical MUD. The flat monthly fee is reasonable; an important factor, considering the vast amount of time needed to build up your character. Furthermore, those looking for a bit of on-line carnage or thievery will feel right at home.

At the moment, *Meridian 59* is the only MUD featuring a 3D engine. It gets high marks partially for its solid content, but mainly for taking a much-needed (though obvious) technological step forward in on-line gaming. Fans of both MUDs and role-playing games are advised to give it a look. Check out **www.3do.com** for more information.

–joe grant bell ■

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QUAKE
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by Scott Udell

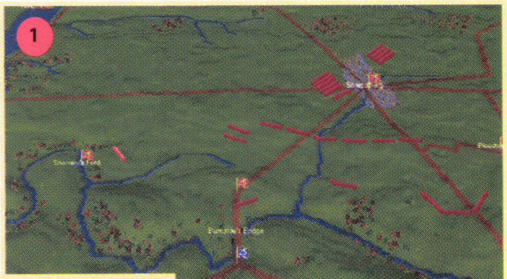
Command Post

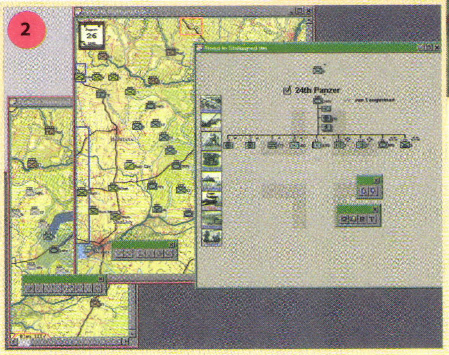
Grognards, shmognards–graphics are *important*

It's almost an axiom in the computer wargaming world that *grognards*–those really hard-core wargamers–don't care about graphics, that they think good numbers are next to godliness and anything else is fluff only wimpy strategy gamers need. Indeed, I remember a friend (perhaps reflecting wargame guru James Dunnigan) saying fairly seriously that his favorite wargame was the spreadsheet *Excel*. Build a beautiful mathematical model and they will come, I guess. Many wargamers can get their enjoyment of a wargame from the relationships of its numbers – calculations of force ratios, combat and strength factors, etc. (they squirm a bit over "fuzzy" numbers, like morale and training); Steve Bauman has noted that many wargamers also like stats-based baseball games. Map graphics and a nice user interface aren't nearly as important as the mass of data and information (data in context?) a truly detailed wargame can present; or at least so they believe (and believe quite vociferously).

Of course, they're wrong. Well, maybe that's a bit too strong (okay, a *lot* too strong). You see, there are two things which bear on the "number gaming" issue. First, many of these wargamers focus on good ol' traditional wargaming: turn-based, with no simultaneous execution of movement and combat. That's because these style of games are the only ones which allow for detailed numerical analysis. They're the only kinds of games that give you the *time* for such analysis, actually. I've harped on the issue often enough; I feel such games are less realistic than something which strives for real-time (or at least continuous-time) play, because they remove a lot of the pressures a real commander would face. That does *not* mean they're necessarily any less fun; the game I've given the highest rating since we started giving ratings (*Battleground: Shiloh*) was just such a game (if not a numerical monster like, say, *Panthers in the Shadows*).

The second thing about the "number gaming" issue is that many wargamers–or at least this one–have a lot of trouble analyzing battlefield status based on numbers; it's easier and faster to look at pictures than to look at data. Pilots (real and simulated) refer to this as situational awareness, and in the world of airborne combat it leads to the development of things like the heads-up display (HUD). Sure, it's a matter of opinion, but I'll take a well thought out graphical display over a load of numbers any day (note, however, the "well thought out" part; too many graphics-heavy displays are a cluttered mess, and actually worse than a clean table of numbers). All of this doesn't mean that the numbers aren't important; not at all. sInstead, they provide the critical underpinning to the pretty face, and should be available to the gamer where necessary (in much the same way a real commander can ask for detailed information on a specific battlefield situation).





[1] Still, graphics don't make the game: Gametek's War College is an example of pretty face undermined by a poor user interface (well, and a generally shoddy design) [2] Road to Moscow certainly looks like it will do well in the graphics department, but will its user interface avoid the pitfalls that Patriot didn't?

On the other hand, even a wargamer wanting better graphics wants it first and foremost for the aid it can provide him or her in gaming, and secondly (perhaps a distant second) for the eye-candy factor. I'll take a crisp, clean, hi-res monochrome display over that of a fuzzy color one any day. An example of this is the old Panther Games title, *Fire Brigade*, which I had on both my Atari ST and my Amiga. The Amiga version had color but at a lower resolution; the ST version had a color mode I didn't use and a hi-res black and white mode that was much nicer than either color display–it more clearly presented me the battlefield information I needed. Of course, I drooled over (indeed, still like) the Mac II images on the back of the box that were both color *and* hi-res; color and clarity are a visual mix that is always nice to aim for.

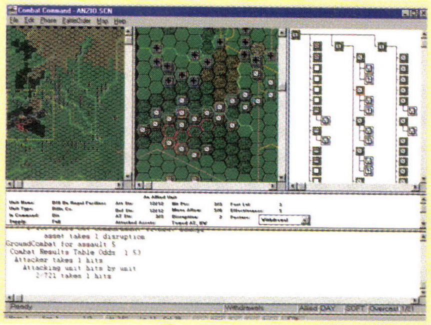
Interface is important, too

Tied almost inextricably to the issue of graphics in wargames is that of user interface, especially now that almost all game interfaces have gone graphical. Here again, you find grognards (or at least some of them) waxing eloquent over the good ol' days of early SSI wargames, where you even used keyboard controls to select and move units. At the time of these games' releases there was little alternative, but many of them (*Battles of Napoleon*, for example) remain popular even today. True, they may have had a wargame design to die for, but I for one can't stand "pomegranate gaming" (where you have to fight to get to the good stuff; see below for an example of this). Whereas graphics are the primary means of game-to-gamer information flow, the user interface is the mirror, providing the only means of getting your commands to those units on that threatened right flank. Again, turn-based gamers have less to worry about, because their battlefield performance won't suffer; they have time to fight the interface (although in games like this, *my* performance still suffers; if I have to fight with a lousy interface I can get bored and/or frustrated and will either bull through with little attention to detail, or just give up and stop playing the game). In contrast, a real-time game really needs to pay attention here; poor interface can sink even the best design; the *Close Combat* interface was simple but just a tad "sticky" (*i.e.*, response to button clicks was a fraction of a second delayed), causing many gamers to give up on an otherwise very good game. Bad interface design may have had more to do with the failure of 360's *Patriot* than anything else; hopefully, the interface on Arsenal's upcoming continuous-time *Road to Moscow* will succeed where *Patriot*'s failed.

The perfect example

Ironically, I just received a game in time for this column which illustrates the good and bad of both graphics and interface implementation. *Combat Command, Volume 1: Danger Forward* is a new wargame from Art of War Publishing (the publishers of the computer wargaming journal *Wargamers Monthly*; they can be reached at 319-351-5396, or 12 Metric Road, Iowa City, IA 52240). A fairly traditional, boardgame-style wargame of WW II combat, it nonetheless appears to feature a lot of interesting elements rarely seen in computer wargaming: complex paradrop, airlanding, and amphibious rules; a seemingly well-thought out command structure; a complete and detailed scenario builder, and a truly flexible-looking asset structure (units can be assigned non-organic "assets" like heavy weapons or armor; an armored unit, for example, could be broken into its constituent assets, which could then be attached to several infantry units. While assets can be shown in the Order of Battle (OOB), they aren't displayed on the map, thereby reducing unnecessary screen clutter.).

You might have noticed a lot of conditional phrases in the preceding paragraph. They're there because I couldn't really dig into the game to check out all those interesting components; I was stopped dead by a few big interface/graphics flaws. The biggest is the combat result-reporting scheme; the results of all the combat which occurs in a turn are printed out in a text pane below the map/OOB displays. When a combat phase occurs, all of the results are printed at once, with no graphical tie-in to the unit representation on the map (periodically I also had some of the results scroll out of the buffer, to be lost forever). Sometimes the text identifies the units involved by name, and sometimes not (and never by hex location), so you have to go searching. Similar problems occur during the defensive artillery support phase. Other interface weaknesses include a strategic map which isn't tied into the tactical zoom map, a "pane-based" window which combines your maps and text display into a fixed pane structure some folks won't care for, a lack of connection between the OOB display and the tactical map (*i.e.*, you can't double click on a unit in the OOB and have the display scroll to that unit), and no next unit/previous unit types of commands (particularly irritating when you want to, say, find all of the units which are about to be assaulted during the defensive fire support phase).



```
        asset takes 1 disruption
GroundCombat for assault 5
 Combat Results Table Odds  1 53
  Attacker takes 1 hits
    Attacking unit hits by unit
      2/721 takes 1 hits
```

Combat Command with all possible panes open: strategic, tactical, and OOB across the top and unit status and message across the screen underneath (note: illustrated are the results of the initial combat phase of the Anzio scenario)

Graphically, the game is mixed. There's not a lot of flash, but the display is crisp and clean and generally easy to understand; the mountains look like mountains, and the beaches like beaches. I had problems with the fact that selected units are apparently surrounded by a thin red line; to me, thin red lines next to black often look black, so I had trouble distinguishing some things on the map and in the OOB display (an aside to game developers: red/green color deficiency is apparently very common, particularly in men; you should keep this in mind when you use color, especially in fine degrees, to differentiate items on a display). There's also no on-map identification of units besides type (armored, artillery, etc) and side (Allied or Axis); instead, you must click on each unit you wish to identify and read its identification (along with a wealth of numerical information).

All of this isn't to say there isn't a great game in there, just that it's hard to get to. David Erickson, president of Art of War, tells me the designers are already working on a revised *Combat Command 2* which, among other things, will provide an on-map tie-in between the combat reports and the graphical unit depictions (they are also working on *Hannibal at the Gates: The Punic Wars*; keep an eye out in *CGS+* for a preview).

I've done it again; run out of space before I've covered a fraction of what I'd like to. As I write this (mid-October), the Christmas release season is looming large, so expect a bunch of game reviews in both this issue and the next several. After this wave passes, it'll be interesting to see what the publishers have in store for us next year. Hmm… I wonder if any of the wargames will have more visually informative graphics, or intuitive user interfaces….■

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by Mike Robel

On War

Part Two: Naval formations– Remaining "classical" and modern formations

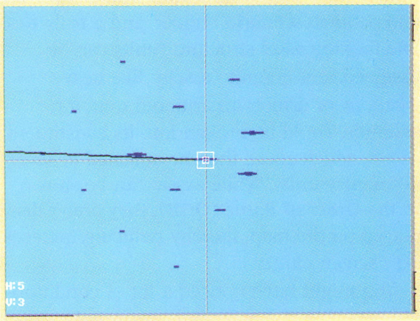


Figure 1 — The bent leg screen

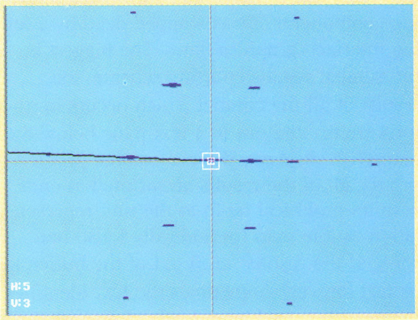


Figure 2 — The circular formation

The bent leg screen (*Figure 1*) is merely a development of the scouting formation. It was primarily used as an Anti-submarine formation. It provides moderate firepower to the front and flanks and has the strongest ASW defense straight ahead.

The circular formation (*Figure 2*) was the forerunner of today's formations. An outer line, usually of destroyers, provided early warning of air raids and protection against submarines. An inner line of cruisers provided still more firepower, while the battleships sat next to the aircraft carriers to provide a final, massive curtain of air defense fires. While under attack, the formation might actually become very tight as the destroyers close in to fill the gaps between the cruisers. Things must have gotten very exciting when the ships were all shooting at attacking aircraft – talk about the potential for fratricide!

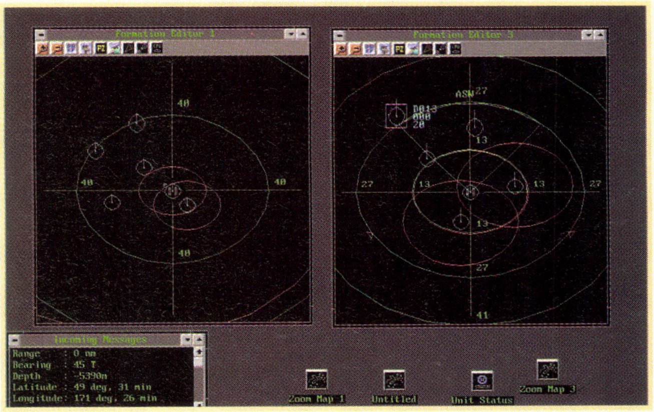
Today we have the benefit of radar and other means of reporting locations and relaying orders. Distance is a function of passive defense against nuclear attack and being able to detect the enemy at a great enough distance to be able to do something about it. About the only maneuver possible by an individual ship captain is turning to unmask his batteries if he does not have a VLS launcher. At the speed differential between a missile and a ship, going to flank speed may not have any effect at all.

In Figures 3 and 4 I have shown two methods for deploying modern ships. The left side shows a weighted formation while the right side shows a conventional circular formation. *Figure 3*, a large scale view of the two formations, allows you to see the weapon ranges and gain an idea for how little individual ship maneuver may count in providing fire. *Figure 4* shows the Formation Editor view so that you may judge the distances between ships (the circular formation may look good in pictures, but it unnecessarily concentrates a battlegroup's units to no real gain).

The circular formation is still used, but the distances are greatly increased. When making a formation, you want to ensure that each ship is protected by the fires of at least two others. This provides an all-around defense that is fairly strong and not weakened appreciably by the loss of one ship. If *Harpoon II* supported nuclear weapons, you would want to place your ships so that a single nuclear weapon could only sink one ship. (*Harpoon Classic* does allow the use of nuclear weapons, but does not model all their effects.) Twenty mile separation between ships is a good rule of thumb, but the ships look a bit lonely.

In certain instances, you may wish to weight your defense against a particular threat. In Figures 6 and 7 you can see that we have done just that. Here I expect the main air threat to be to the Northeast. Accordingly, I have place three guided missile destroyers supported in that direction and the carrier is in the back, supported by only a single cruiser and two destroyers. Even there, the cruiser and one of the destroyers are weighted toward the assumed enemy direction while the other destroyer guards against a submarine or other attack from the rear. This may be a bit extreme, but it serves to show that the carrier or other high value ships do not have to be in the center of a circular formation.

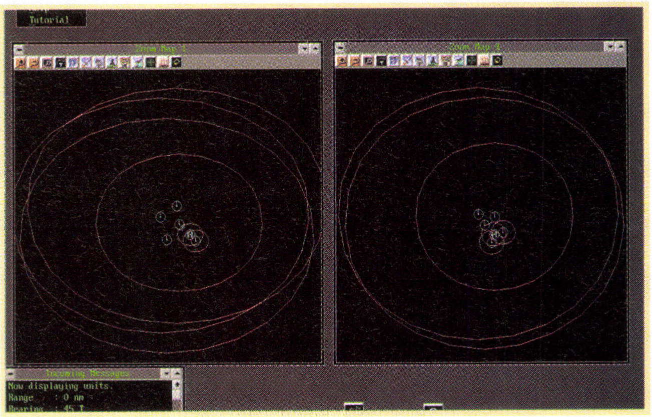
If you wish to study Naval Tactics in greater detail, I recommend *Fleet Tactics*, by Captain Wayne P. Hughes, which is available in most bookstores by special order. GDW's *Harpoon* has an excellent treatment of modern battle tactics (If you can find the boxed game). *Combat Command* by Frederick C. Sherman provides a first person view of World War II carrier formations and tactics. ■



Incoming Messages

```
Range     : 0 nm
Bearing   : 45 T
Depth     : -5390m
Latitude  : 49 deg, 31 min
Longitude : 171 deg, 26 min
```

Figure 3 — Modern weighted (left) and circular (right) formations



Incoming Messages

```
Now displaying units.
Range     : 0 nm
Bearing   : 45 T
```

Figure 4 — Harpoon II Formation Editor views of the weighted and conventional circular formations

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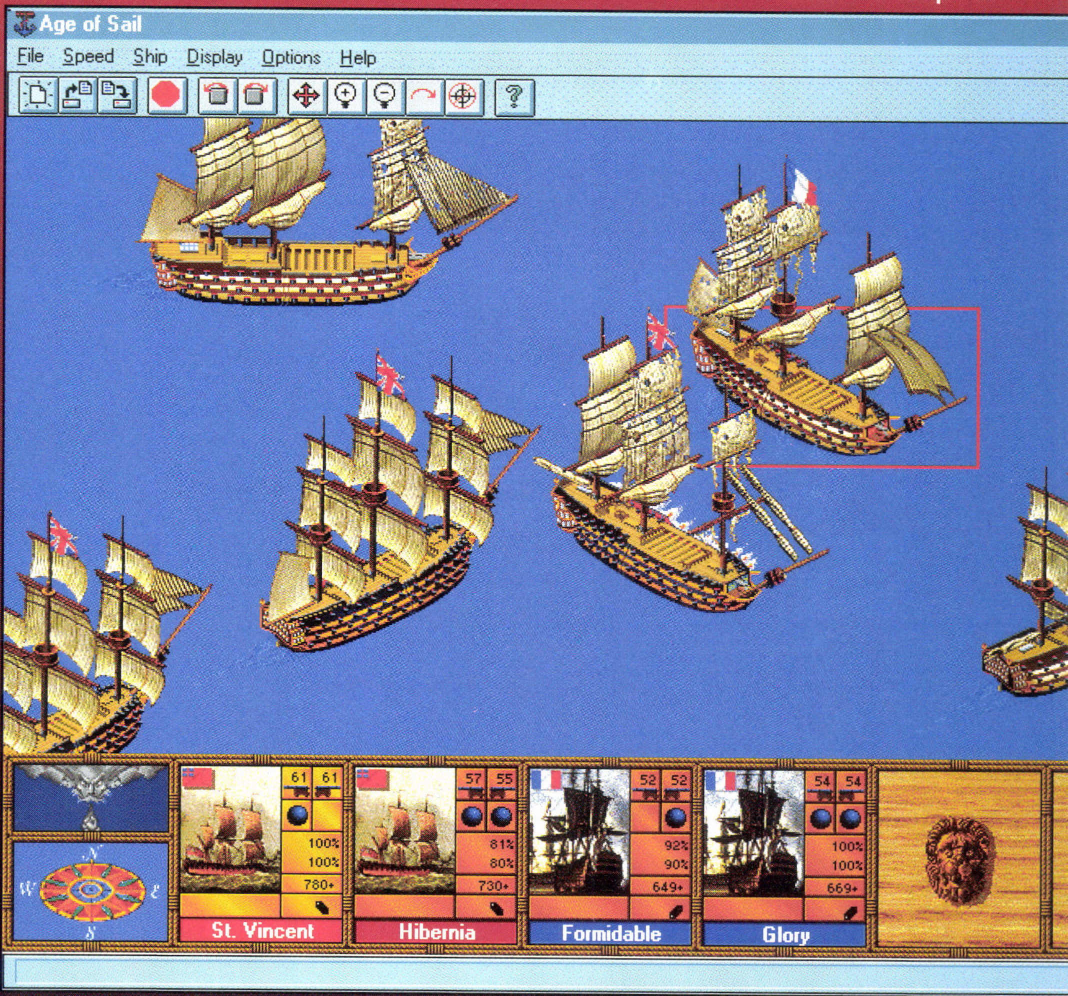
Age of Sail
File Speed Ship Display Options Help
61 61
100%
100%
780+
St. Vincent
57 55
81%
80%
730+
Hibernia
52 52
92%
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649+
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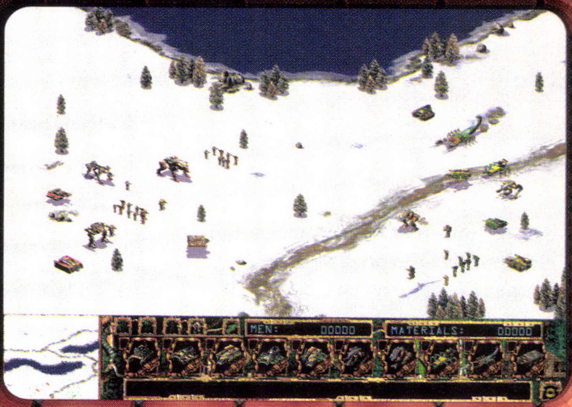

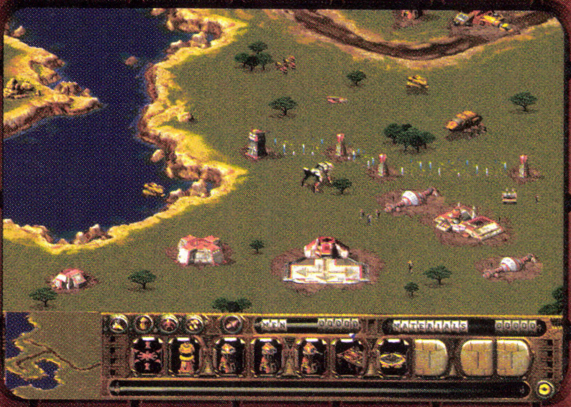

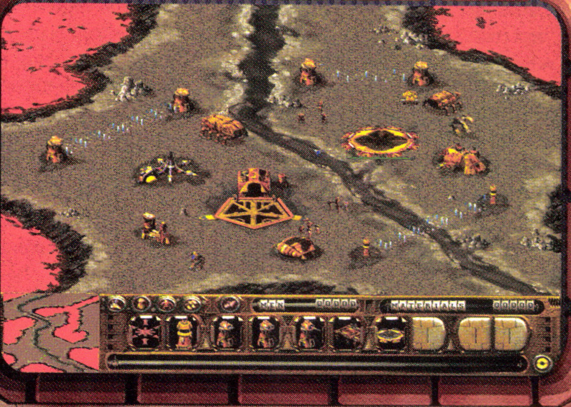

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From Korea to the future

Steel Panthers II: Modern Battles

SSI

DOS

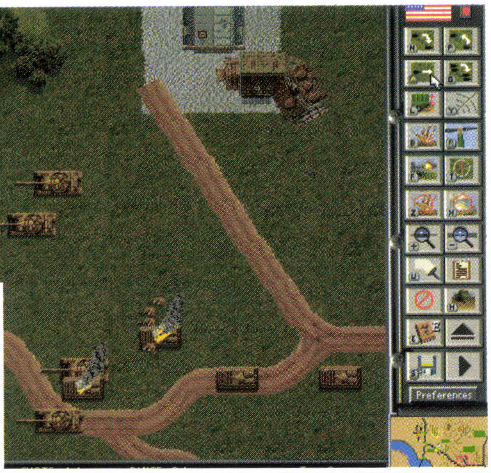
★★★☆☆

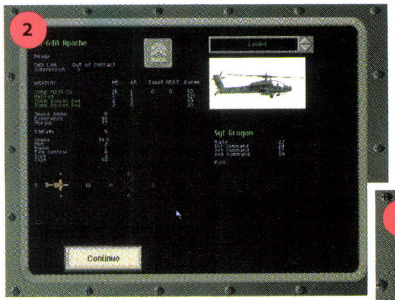
[1] Tanks and IFVs advancing

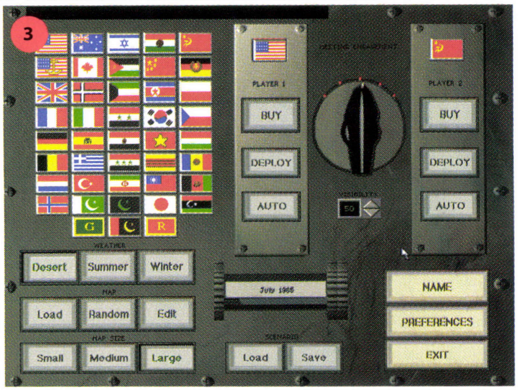
[2] Numbers galore

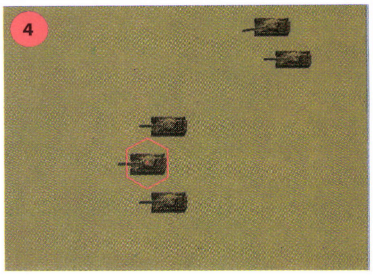
[3] Ahh, the desert; happy hunting grounds for TOW-2s

[4] A typically staggering array of nations is included









Boasting numerous enhancements and changes from the original, *Steel Panthers II* game remains true to its roots, emphasizing ease of play and audio visual flash over hard core detail. Gameplay is nearly identical to the previous installment; anyone who has played one should find no trouble with the other. The interface looks sharper, and the video clips are snazzier (in color, no less), but the shell is substantially the same. Terrain remains largely as it was: single story buildings, and your basic grass-trees-sand landscapes. Sounds are superb, as expected; jets whiz and zoom, choppers make whuppa-whuppa noises, and rifle fire reverberates. Unit icons are also well done, with impressive aircraft and battle tanks, though infantry is still clusters of dots with legs (isn't there a better way to do this?). All in all, a visual feast.

As far as play goes, the game is very much like its predecessor. Canned scenarios, generated or created battles, and of course campaigns are all here; six campaigns are included, plus the "long campaign," covering as much time and as many generated battles as you want, against up to three different opponents. The included scenarios range from Korea to hypothetical Russia-Ukraine fighting; the campaigns include Korea, the Middle East, Germany, and a couple of hypothetical US wars in Asia. Just about every major military power, and many minor nations, are included in the selection of forces, as are most weapons fielded between VJ Day and today.

Whether this is a great game or just a good one will really depend on how you approach it. If you want super realism, dedicated accuracy, and attention to detail, keep walking. This is definitely a post-*Panzer General* wargame. Numbers galore abound, to be sure, but the strain of fitting modern fighting into the *Steel Panthers* engine is painfully obvious in places. The sheer variety and complexity of sighting systems, for instance, cries out for special and specific treatment. So do dual-purpose chain guns, helicopters, HEAT rounds (which, oddly, the game won't let you use against infantry), effective gun stabilization, varying ATGM speeds, and the like. The game does a fair job with all this, is commendable even, considering the liabilities it labors under, but it really can't compare in these areas to a dedicated modern combat simulator like Arsenal's *TacOps*. Of course, it's also much prettier and arguably at least as much fun as that game, so the choice is clear: fun or facts?

Some particular problems in the game which detract from gameplay include quirky lines of sight, with mysterious 10 foot hexes popping up in otherwise clear areas; sighting rules that seem to offer you a choice of always spotting firing units, or almost never spotting them unless within about five hexes; no tell-tale smoke plumes from ATGMs; the inability to load leg mortar units on helicopters (much less have choppers carry howitzers and light vehicles); and an AI that, once again, makes Saddam Hussein look like a genius. Some aspects of the game are just plain weird. The number of shots, for instance. Say a tank has four weapons (three MGs and a main gun). If you target an enemy, and just fire, every weapon in range will fire once. So, if you had four shots for each weapon, you'd get sixteen (4x4) shots of various types. Target a unit, however, and then select a specific weapon to fire, and it's very different. You might just fire the coax MG, but all your weapons will lose a shot. Your maximum shots in this case is then four, of all types combined. It should be one or the other, folks, and the second way is probably more realistic. And, arrgh!, the game still puts info at both the top and the bottom of the screen during play.

Countering these drawbacks are such glories as configurable airstrike corridors; artillery-delivered mines; lots and lots of different, funky units; a better random campaign structure, and lots of little touches, like being able to evade missiles and having reactive armor defeat HEAT rounds. There is indeed much to like here.

Then again, like *Steel Panthers*, too, this game looks like SSI booted it out the door a wee bit prematurely. There are some undocumented features (counterbattery fire), glitches (enemy bunkers show up as aircraft in the info screen), and a skimpy manual which really doesn't help much at all. The readme file is unreadable as is; apparently, SSI hasn't yet heard of word wrap.

These things aren't going to affect most gamers' opinions of the game, though. The battles in this game are more fun, and I'd say more realistic, than in the original; infantry is actually valuable (try a USMC Rifle Company some time), and stubborn defenses are actually possible. The battles still feel relatively generic, however, and you're still fighting east/west almost all of the time; how hard could it be to have some north/south battles? The campaign victory conditions also remain arcane; some battles appear completely unwinnable, while others end after only a few turns with complete victories.

Still, the game has so many strengths, in sheer playability and variety, that most will overlook its shortcomings. The times when you can actually use air and amphibious assaults to end run the enemy, when your A-10 strike breaks up an enemy attack in the nick of time, or when that last SMAW unit takes out the tank that was closing in on your victory hex make up for a lot of flaws.

Like the 1970s SPI boardgames published under the title *Modern Battles* (1&2), *Steel Panthers II* is modern warfare without a hard edge. The game is colorful, incredibly varied, and instantly accessible. If you want a totally realistic simulation, customized more precisely to this or that historical scenario, you may want to look elsewhere. If all you're looking for is a good game, however, this is the business, if only for the visceral appeal of finally getting a system which will let you play out some of those old *Red Star/White Star* scenarios from the 1970's. TOW Jeeps vs. T-62s, anyone?

If someone could just combine this sort of graphic pizzazz with a true dedication to realism, we'd have a stellar product. As it is, *Steel Panthers II* is, finally, a worthy successor to a very successful game, but could use improvements in the area of realism. *–Robert Mayer*

Destiny

Interactive Magic

Windows 95

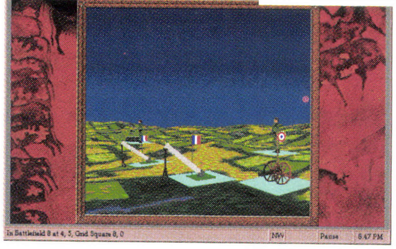
★★☆☆☆

Destiny aims to be an all-inclusive empire builder spanning the Stone Age to the Space Age. It allows you to manage trade, resources, research, diplomacy, education, health, and command the military in a 3D world. If all this seems like a lot, it is; and it's been carried off with mixed results.

As compared to some other games of its kind, there is little excitement early on; no barbarians, no random "huts" to locate, no hidden world to explore. There is also a lack of feeling like you are involved in a dynamic world. You are not informed of natural disasters that hit opponent civilizations, no wonders are created to hear about, and you don't get word on how your civilization stacks up to others.

Building up your cities involves building, upgrading, maintaining, selling, and mothballing some structures, in addition to using workers, materials, and research, but it's an involving process and often overwhelming. The fact that you are usually tied to managing your cities decreases the enjoyment of spending time looking around in the 3D view, commanding armies, etc. Autopilot is available to help build up your cities, but it also countermands orders to your forces.

The existence of a full 3D landscape helps differentiate *Destiny* from others of the same genre which offer only 2D sprites on a bitmapped landscape. Even so, *Destiny* offers only "pixelated" graphics, and even in this mode may run too slowly on some systems. Commanding forces in a real time battle is difficult. The computer moves too quickly, and you click like mad to give orders to individual forces (group commands are not available). Another option, having the computer calculate a battle, isn't as satisfying, because of the obvious loss of control; you don't see it "played out," and you don't get info as to how many units were killed. This leaves turn-based mode as the practical alternative, but the initially released version freezes when turn-based mode is attempted.



Unit listings in the production menu are alphabetical and not listed by ability or technology. This forces the player to scroll through many obsolete types before getting to an appropriate unit. Units have many different, useful commands you can issue, allowing them to patrol, look for resources, establish cities, etc. Customization of forces is possible through use of naming and designing your own unique compositions.

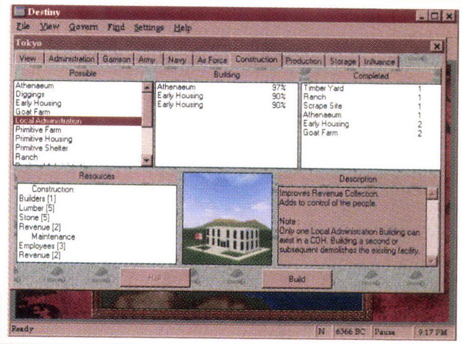
Destiny offers modem/LAN support for up to eight players but unfortunately version 1.12 has a bug that does not allow network saved games to operate properly. Multi-player gameplay involving three or more people offers potential opportunities to intercept chat messages but does not allow for battlefield mode, auto-pilot, or pauses.

Tracks of music are very good but most of the sound effects, while varied, are just satisfactory. Upon clicking on a unit, for example, the resulting "Can I help you?" sounds like a lame salesperson.

Destiny's interface lacks pizzazz; a liberal dose of extra color and more varied wallpaper would help. Mouse clicks are often not immediately recognized, taking several attempts to accomplish a simple task.

The encyclopedia includes a bizarre mix of info seemingly thrown in haphazardly, and does not contain individual unit or discovery information (an Adobe Acrobat file can be printed to get this information, but it's awkward to access during gameplay). Scattered throughout, however, are hints, game effects, and game notes.

Destiny is an ambitiously detailed project, but too much is asked from the player in terms of management. It definitely has great potential that could be realized through planned patches. A game that is as detailed and comprehensive as *Destiny* demands a proper interface, playability level, and rewarding gameplay to eliminate frustration and maintain enjoyment. Otherwise, a gamer will feel like he is a slave to the game and not in control of his own destiny. *–Michael Bowen*


Destiny
File View Govern Find Settings Help
View Administration Garrison Army Navy Air Force Construction Production Storage Influence
Build
Ready
N 6366 BC Pause 9:17 PM

Tokyo

Possible
- Athenaeum
- Diggings
- Early Housing
- Goat Farm
- Local Administration
- Primitive Farm
- Primitive Housing
- Primitive Shelter
- Ranch

Building	
Athenaeum	97%
Early Housing	90%
Early Housing	90%

Completed	
Timber Yard	1
Ranch	1
Scrape Site	1
Athenaeum	1
Early Housing	2
Goat Farm	2

Resources

Construction
Builders [1]
Lumber [5]
Stone [5]
Revenue [2]
Maintenance
Employees [3]
Revenue [2]

Description

Improves Revenue Collection.
Adds to control of the people.

Note :
Only one Local Administration Building can exist in a COH. Building a second or subsequent demolishes the existing facility.

Destiny

* * *

The patch issued at press time contains auto-start, allowing new facilities that have only one available task to start automatically. Auto-build is implemented through a governor who will manage food production, housing, education, and health levels in any city. Turn-based mode now works, but when used in 3D combat, you only hear a portion of the sound effects available in real-time mode. This first of several planned patches adds a 1/2 star to my review.

* * *

[*Interactive Magic informs us that in addition to this first patch two others should be available by the time you read this, and that all new production runs of the game will integrate all three patches. The patches are available on-line and will also be sent out free-of-charge to anyone who calls their tech-support line (919-461-0948).*]

Third Reich

Avalon Hill

DOS

★★☆☆☆

In the days of yore, when "wargame" meant a paper map, cardboard counters, dice, and a thick rule book, Avalon Hill came out with *Third Reich*, a grand strategic recreation of the European side of the Second World War. Focusing on economics as well as fighting, *Third Reich* became something of a classic; indeed, before *Advanced Squad Leader*, *Third Reich* was perhaps the game most closely associated with Avalon Hill. Not surprisingly, *Third Reich* was one of the titles AH was most interested in producing for the

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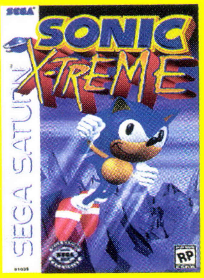
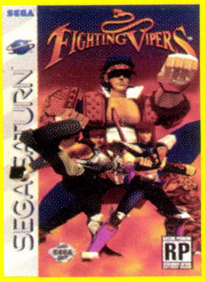
'TWISTED METAL 2' Sweet Tooth and the boys reach new moral lows in the most repugnant driving game ever. Using a host of weapons and combo moves, blow up world landmarks in 8 new challenging, multi-level battlegrounds. **PSX $50**

'SOVIET STRIKE' Anyone can build a concrete steel building. But it takes a darn good soldier to bring one down. You can customize Apache assault chopper, hellfire missiles and chain guns for an outfit that's not suppose to exist. **PSX $49**



'SONIC X-TREME' Sonic can move in any direction with full camera rotation. Evil genius Robotnik has created a Death Egg so huge that its gravitational pull is sucking up all 5 surrounding worlds. Sonic's job is to rescue the Mips before they can be destroyed. **SAT $46**

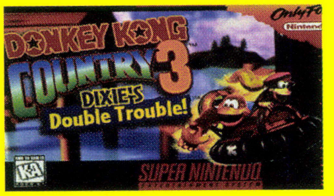
'STAR WARS SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE' Smooth play control is surrounded by amazing and highly detailed graphics featuring texture mapped 3-D polygons! **NIN 64 $72**



'FIGHTING VIPERS' moves at a blistering speed, with fighters moving at lightning-fast speed & 200 plus moves. Sound effects of the arcade are here, house music, techno-rave soundtrack and all the bells and whistles you'd expect. **SAT $46**

'CRUIS'N USA' Choose from several vehicles in this wild 14 stage ride across the great American highways. Split screen perspective allows 2 players to share the action simultaneously.**NIN 64 $62**

'ULTIMATE MORTAL KOMBAT 3' Shao Kahn has entered the earth realm to punish humans and wrench their souls. **Genesis $69 Saturn $58 SNES $71**

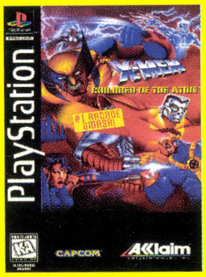


'DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 3' New friends and enemies make the adventure more exciting, while checking out new unexplored areas featuring lots of hidden areas. **SNES $64**

'DRAGON FORCE' The world of Legendra has fallen prey to the frightening reign of Madurk. His unquenchable thirst for power has replaced tranquillity with terror and honor with treachery. **SAT $48**

'FINAL DOOM' Skewered corpses, gut wrenching shotgun blasts and demonic backgrounds are some of the enhancements of Final Doom. Fluid movement that's free of slowdown is another feature in this bloodfest! Making Final Doom the best corridor shooter around! **PSX $52**

'MARVEL SUPER HEROES: WAR OF THE GEMS' Choose your favorite Marvel characters and battle Thanos, the most dangerous villain in the Marvel Universe! **SNES $54**



'X-MEN: CHILDREN OF THE ATOM' The most popular X-Men train for head to head combat by using Professor X's invention of the "Danger Room." The X-Men spar against each other or face phantasms of their most infamous enemies.**PSX $50**

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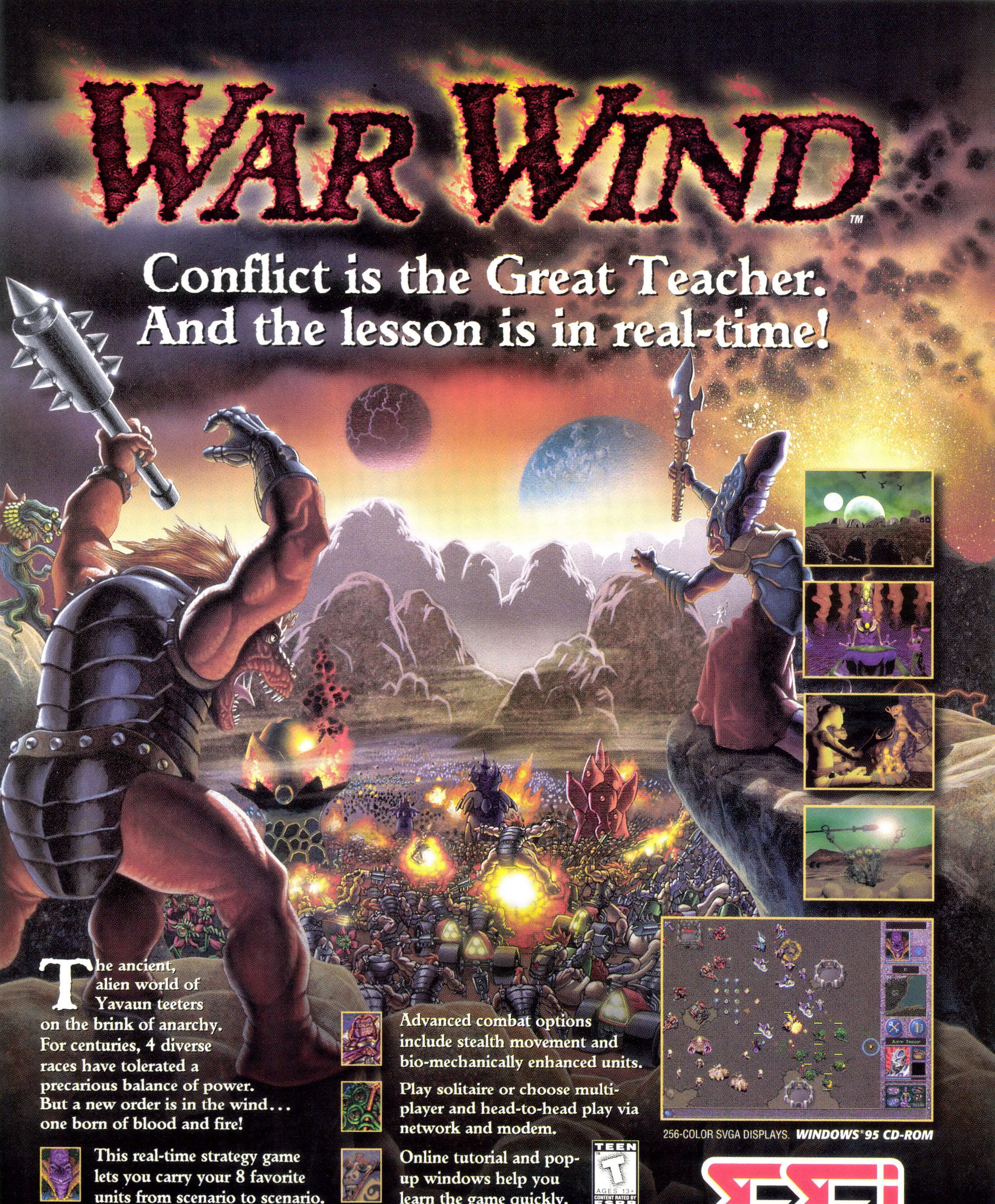

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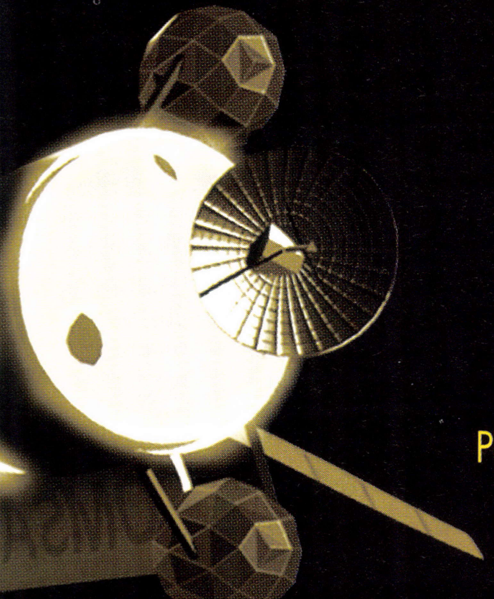

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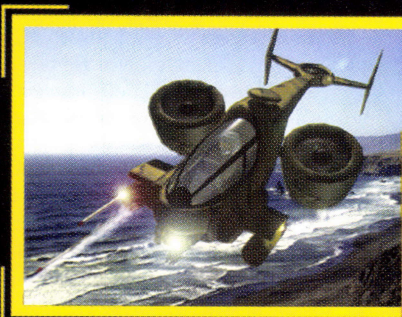

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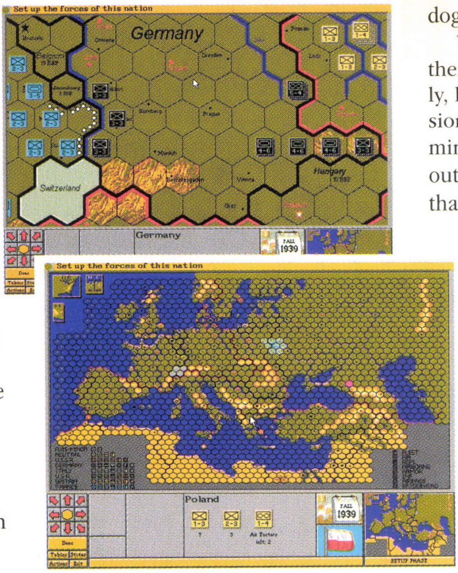


▲ Third Reich

computer. Early efforts (particularly one for the Amiga) flopped, killed by inexperience, glitches, and awful AI. For years AH labored to bring forth a PC version of the game worthy of its name. The final result of these efforts arrived late in 1996 with *Third Reich* for the PC.

The years of development were largely wasted, I'm afraid. Though eagerly awaited by some wargamers, *Third Reich* for the PC fails to live up to expectations. Its good points are few: good, colorful manuals, an accurate recreation of the board-game (for those who like that sort of thing) and a sincere attempt on the part of the design and programming team to make this thing work. The bad points, unfortunately, are legion. Sixteen-color VGA graphics (in an era of SVGA 256 color games), poor font choices (most of them are distorted and hard to read on larger monitors), gameplay that is so much a recreation of the board game that even the computer player has to move the mouse pointer and click the mouse buttons… the list goes on. The game is buggy, crashes are frequent, and the initial release sometimes has problems with loading saved games. While the AI follows the rules (to the extent of getting trapped in infinite loops while reminding itself that what it is doing is illegal), it is pedestrian, and its moves go by so fast you can't really follow what it is doing.

Avalon Hill obviously wanted a game which mirrored their boardgame hit exactly, and this has led them astray. No concession to the capabilities of the computer has been made. There is no fog of war, there are no hidden units, no options to allow the computer to take over parts of the battle for you. You can only assign individual players (human or synthetic) to specific nations by hot seating; against the computer, you play either all the Allies, or all the Axis. While the game reproduces the mechanics of its cardboard ancestor faithfully, it makes playing the game more difficult than ever. The viewable area of the map is too small, the overview map is unbelievably ugly, and the map and counters in general are, at best, bland, at worst, awful. Charts and tables are hard to read, and there are so many of them, all buried in little control panels, that you could starve to death before finding the one you want. All in all, as Monty might say, a dog's breakfast.

What to make of AH's efforts, then? If you absolutely, positively, have to have a computer version of *Third Reich* (and don't mind that it is the somewhat outdated 4th Edition, rather than the Advanced version) this should do, though it isn't that much better than setting up the pieces and playing solitaire. For gamers hoping for a modern, engrossing game system, one relying on strategy more than bean counting, or for those new to WWII games, *Third Reich* is as about as welcome as Jeffrey Maier at an Orioles family picnic. Avalon Hill obviously tried to make this a good game, but the focus on a direct port, the outdated technology, and the poor execution have rendered their blood, sweat and tears merely bloody awful. From the near celebration of the Nazis in the opening graphics, to the ugly interface, the game disappoints. Bugs, crashes, and glitches also detract from a game whose entire premise (take a 1970s era boardgame and make a complete digital analog of it) is off target. They would have been much better off taking the concept of *Third Reich* (WWII strategic warfare) and making an original game out of it. Instead, they chose to produce a 1988 vintage game eight years too late. *–Robert Mayer*

Wooden Ships & Iron Men

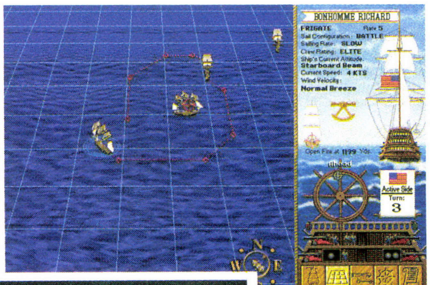
Avalon Hill

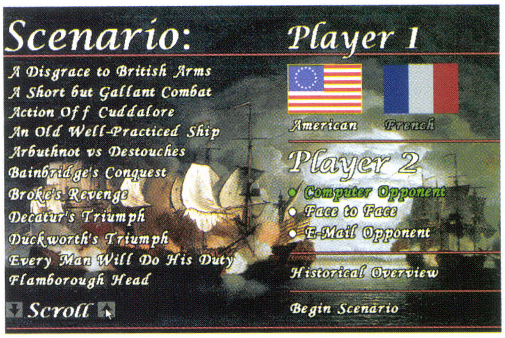
DOS

★★☆☆☆

Wooden Ships & Iron Men is the second computer iteration of Avalon Hill's (and formerly Yaquinto's) board game covering the era of fighting sail (1775-1815). While this period is well-covered in the literary genre (Forester's *Hornblower*, Kent's *Bolitho*, O'Brien's *Aubrey/Maturin* et al.), it has been relatively short-changed in the computer field (SSI's *Broadsides*, released in 1983 for the 8-bit machines, remains the most enjoyable game of this period).

Wooden Ships & Iron Men is a turn-based game, with each turn representing three minutes of real time. Scale and distance are adjustable based upon zoom options, but an easy-to-use measuring sextant may easily tell one any distance in yards. Instead of board hexagons, one may now move in 45-degree arcs (in effect, octagons), sail and crew functions are expanded (plain sail has been added between full and battle sail), and crew members must be assigned to "working the ship" if the player desires any maneuverability. The assignment of crew to "sails" emphasizes the trade-off between firepower and maneuver; "tacking" (a turn across the wind, requiring more hands and more training) becomes a decision in which the player must consciously reduce his firepower by maintaining at least 20% of the crew for the sails.


BONHOMME RICHARD
FRIGATE Rate 5
Sail Configuration: BATTLE
Sailing Rate: SLOW
Crew Rating: ELITE
Ship's Current Attitude: Starboard Beam
Current Speed: 4 KTS
Wind Velocity: Normal Breeze
Open Fire at 1199 Yds.

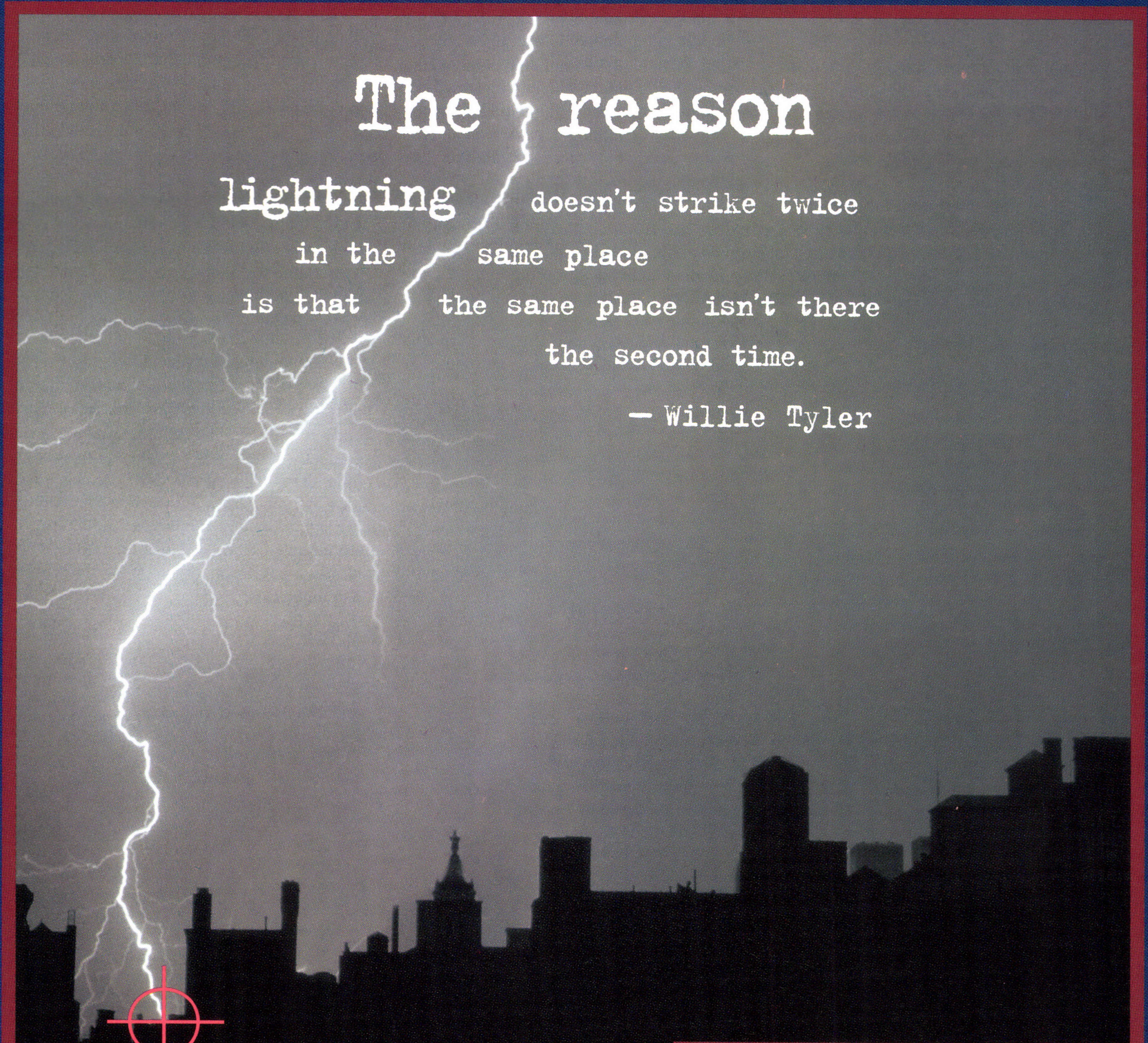

Scenario:
A Disgrace to British Arms
A Short but Gallant Combat
Action Off Cuddalore
An Old Well-Practiced Ship
Arbuthnot vs Destouches
Bainbridge's Conquest
Broke's Revenge
Decatur's Triumph
Duckworth's Triumph
Every Man Will Do His Duty
Flamborough Head
Player 1
American French
Player 2
✓ Computer Opponent
• Face to Face
• E-Mail Opponent

▲ Wooden Ships & Iron Men

The game does have several strengths: it is a faithful rendition of the board game; its game play is relatively quick and easy; and it has a scenario editor which allows one to quickly "roll his own" game. (Note: for those interested in historical scenarios, Dave Arneson's redesign of his miniatures rules for *Don't Give Up the Ship* delineates every ship-to-ship engagement between 1600 and 1850.)

Unfortunately, there are plenty of weaknesses as well. First off, *Wooden Ships* is a faithful rendition of the board game. "Be careful what you ask for — you may get it." The adage proves true, in that the game is a faithful adaptation with enhancements. But the problem with any adaptation is that one is designing a simulation of a simulation — and hence another step further removed from reality.

The graphics and gameplay are somewhat sterile. One cannot determine who did what to whom (in a multi-ship engagement). After the turn, one may examine any and all ships for damage, but one cannot determine what "shot" caused what damage. Boarding parties are as exciting as receiving a third-class letter; one simply allocates crew members to board, and then the resolution will be exhibited in a scroll. There is no dynamic tension and no interpreting how either side won or lost. Finally, any victory or defeat always


The reason
lightning doesn't strike twice
in the same place
is that the same place isn't there
the second time.
— Willie Tyler

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results in a similar static screen of a burning ship. While too many games today emphasize graphics over gameplay, there is still a need for some graphical action which will enhance the player's interest, and here, the ships move in a background which never wavers and appears as a fixed montage and not a dynamic ocean.

The AI is weak in gunnery, *i.e.*, it reflects French tactics of concentrating on rigging as opposed to hull. And we know how effective French tactics were in the long run. Contrary to Hollywood lessons, boarding actions were rare. Yet, in a multi-ship engagement (Trafalgar), the computer playing itself resolved 80% of the actions by boarding parties and melee action.

Player input can be clumsy; one must achieve a certain amount of sailing speed in order to turn, but the player cannot simply return to the last waypoint of maneuver. He must redo the entire ship's movement in order to get it "right."

The campaign is not! One can only play an American captain during the War of 1812, and in effect, the campaign is simply a four-month cruise. Many days, nothing will occur, and one simply reads the captain's log which rapidly grows repetitious. The campaign generally results in too many engagements against warships and not enough against merchantmen.

This is a DOS-based game; it does not like Windows 95. It does not run well in DOS-mode under Windows 95. Even in DOS, it is somewhat fragile and prone to crash (particularly in the campaign). Like the financial institutions say, "save early and save often".

In 1986, Avalon Hill released an 8-bit version of *Wooden Ships* which suffered from poor design, poor graphics and poor gameplay. A decade later, the redesign is much more faithful to its boardgame ancestor, but the game suffers from mediocre design, mediocre graphics and mediocre gameplay. While the advertising promises "invasions, plundering, pillaging and more," these are wholly absent as are shoals and land masses. Overall, it is reminiscent of a sex manual from the 1950s — it covers everything, but in a manner which is so dull that one is not really sure why one should indulge. Despite all its flaws, it is the best age of sail combat game currently available for the PC-market. *–M. Evan Brooks*

War Wind

SSI

Windows 95

★★★½☆

After weathering a torrential downpour of *Doom* and *Myst* clones, the computer gaming industry is now under assault from yet another hail of "me-too" products. Yes, that's right: we've officially entered the era of *Warcraft II* and *Command & Conquer* clones.

Of course, clones aren't *always* bad, and one can hardly fault the game designers. By imitating the successful games of the past, developers get a chance to tap into a preexisting market, one which will (hopefully) embrace their product with open arms. The downside of this approach is equally apparent: any product imitating a great game is inevitably compared with its predecessor, and usually comes up short.

To be fair, *War Wind*, SSI's new entry in the *Warcraft II* vein, tries very hard to add original elements to the old familiar formula, and it offers added depth in the form of four different races, numerous creature upgrades, and the inclusion of research. These efforts will appeal to gamers who felt that *Warcraft II* lacked depth and scope; others, however, will remember that simplicity was a key virtue of both *Warcraft II* and *Command & Conquer*.

LEADER'S NAME
CLAN'S NAME
Druk Angrak
House Mandra
LOAD A SAVED GAME
LOAD A BUILT-IN SCENARIO
CHANGE GAME OPTIONS
CHANGE SOUND OPTIONS
VIEW IDEOLOGY
VIEW EARNED CINEMATICS
VIEW CREDITS
QUIT GAME
BEGIN NEW CAMPAIGN

War Wind takes place on the tumultuous planet Yavaun, where four races vie for supremacy: the Tha'Roon, lizard-like creatures who once asserted control over the world; the Obblinox, a sturdy warrior race who served as the Tha'Roon's enforcers; Eaggra, plant creatures who were servants in the Tha'Roon's empire; and Shama' Li, a race of three-eyed mystics. Each race has different strengths and goals; each race has its own seven-mission campaign for supremacy. Seven missions might not sound like much, but the maps are large, and you're working with four different races, so it does add up to a lot of playing time.

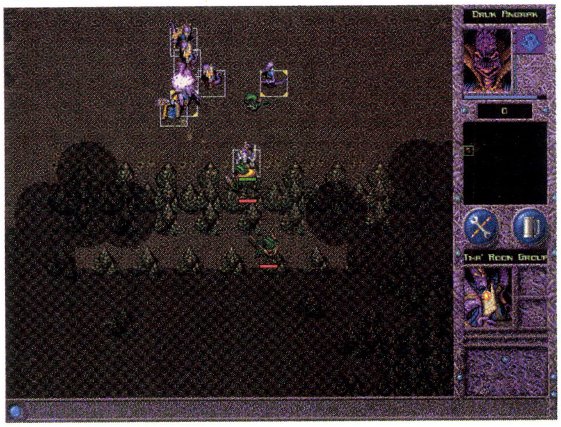
Each race is unique; both the strengths of their troops and the focus of their missions are quite distinctive. The game's READ.ME file contains detailed notes on the first two missions of each race's campaign, so even novices can quickly get a clue.

Multi-player options are numerous, and include both network and on-line play, with built-in support for the MPlayer network. Up to eight players can participate in network battles; as with *Warcraft II*, three players can play from a single CD. Six-player games therefore require two copies of the game, while full eight-player games require three copies. In addition, the now-obligatory level editor is also included, enabling would-be game designers to test their mettle, or simply whip up new maps for network play.

With its comprehensive manual, handy level editor and fully featured network play, plus its multiple races, units, technologies and campaigns, *War Wind* does an admirable job of covering all the bases. However, in covering those bases, it spreads itself rather thinly, and in some ways falls short of its precursors. It lacks the jump-in-and-have-at-it simplicity which characterized *Warcraft II* and made it accessible to such a wide range of gamers. *War Wind* has lots of units with lots of abilities and upgrades, which will please detail-conscious players, but a measure of elegance has fallen by the wayside in providing this extra detail.

Simplicity also suffers because of the multitude of races, and their essentially foreign physiognomy. You can't just look at a Peasant and say "Aha, a Peasant!" Instead, you'll find yourself squinting at a multitude of strange little aliens. The structures of each race also have unique names, even when they all serve the same function (i.e. barracks, tavern, storehouse). That adds an unnecessary level of initial confusion. Some gamers, of course, will enjoy this.

War Wind



Graphics aren't as polished as those of *Warcraft II*, though the sheer variety of units and structures somewhat makes up for that fact. More troubling is the general "muddiness" of the graphics; units aren't as readily distinguishable from one another as they should be; the Fog of War (which cannot be disabled) doesn't help here.

The game also suffers from a lack of visceral involvement. Perhaps the bizarre races are at fault; leading a charge of bloodthirsty Orcs or a squad of veteran Grenadiers really gets your heart pumping, while leading a shambling, hissing cadre of lizards or a clump of sentient weeds does not.

War Wind is not a bad game by any means, and its developers' attention to detail is admirable. Avid real-time strategy gamers who can handle the bizarre races and enjoy the added depth will undoubtedly like it. However, the rest of us will agree that less is sometimes more…and in the case of *War Wind*, more is sometimes less. *–Joe Grant Bell*

Díe. Díe. Díe.

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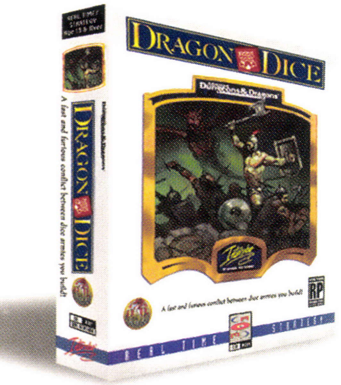
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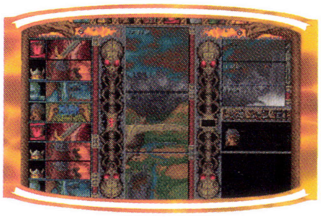

Select Action
1st March
Maneuver or Attack

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BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

Admiral-Sea Battles

Megamedia

Windows 95

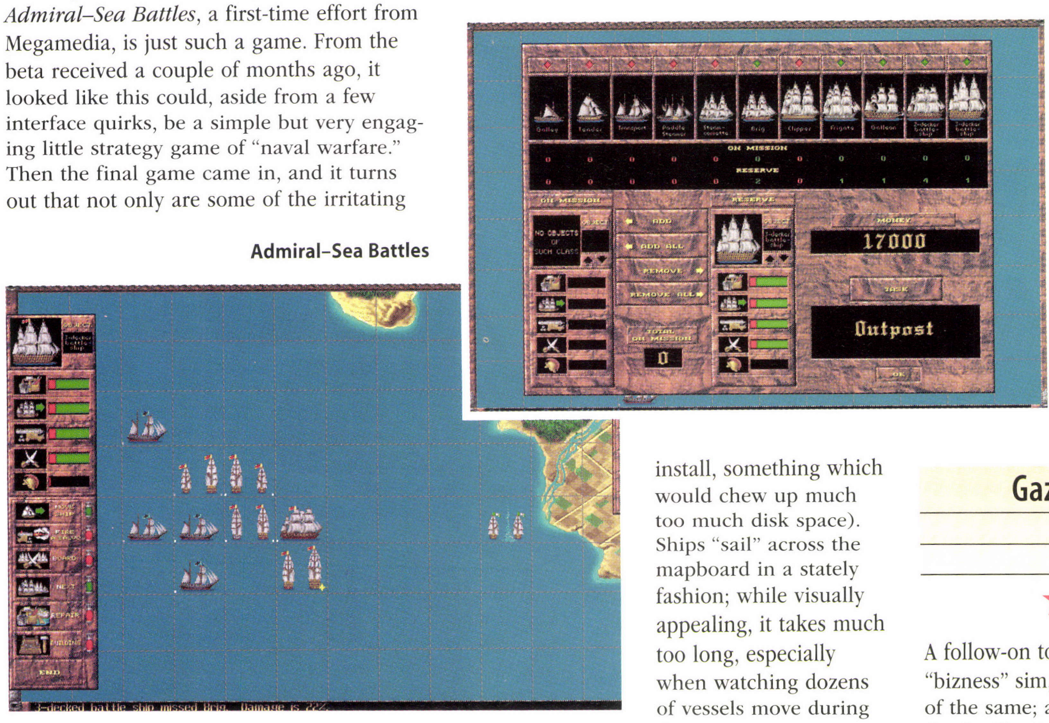
★★☆☆☆

Every once in a while we get in a game that could almost make me cry; it comes so close to being a lot of fun, but because of just one or two problems, absolutely fails. *Admiral–Sea Battles*, a first-time effort from Megamedia, is just such a game. From the beta received a couple of months ago, it looked like this could, aside from a few interface quirks, be a simple but very engaging little strategy game of "naval warfare." Then the final game came in, and it turns out that not only are some of the irritating interface quirks still there, but the scenarios as designed are so outrageously difficult they render the game almost impossible to enjoy.

Admiral is superficially similar some of those Milton Bradley board games you see in a toy store: pretty map, simple "units," and simple rules. The game claims to portray naval warfare in the 18th century, but you have a variety of ship classes from many periods in the Age of Sail (including steam-assisted vessels from the 19th century). Your goal is to move your ships about the mapboard, avoiding dangerous waters and taking on enemy vessels and forts (you may even be called upon to build forts or ports). Your actions are straightforward: move, fire, and board, primarily. Unfortunately, the user interface isn't well thought out; when you click on a ship, you have to go back to a command bar to click on an order button, then move back to choose the area to move to or the ship to fire upon or attempt to board. What should have been done was to allow clicking on a ship directly, to have its movement ranges and fire opportunities pop up automatically; it would have saved a lot of mouse clicking and movement which, while it sounds petty, can actually chew up a lot of time.

The art of the mapboard is beautiful, and the ships are nicely detailed. You can have little animations play for gunfire, boarding, and the like, but since these make the game drag, the ability to turn them off is much appreciated. Sounds are sparse yet well done, but the music, while good enough, seems very out of place (for example, the main menu music sounds more like something from a Charlie Brown cartoon); while you can theoretically put in your own music CD, errors will occur any time you try to run an animation (unless you've done a full install, something which would chew up much too much disk space). Ships "sail" across the mapboard in a stately fashion; while visually appealing, it takes much too long, especially when watching dozens of vessels move during the enemy turn.

Admiral–Sea Battles



	Galley	Tender	Transport	Paddle Steamer	Steam-corvette	Brig	Clipper	Frigate	Galleon	2-decker battle-ship	3-decker battle-ship
ON MISSION	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
RESERVE	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	4	1

TOTAL ON MISSION 0

MONEY 17000

TASK Outpost

3-decked battle ship missed Brig. Damage is 22%.

Gameplay is simple yet attractive. You maneuver your vessels as you attempt to gain an advantage over the enemy fleets and forts (watch out for forts–their guns outdistance almost everything you have!). Wind direction changes, and periods of calm and storm occur at periodic intervals. Shallow water will prevent the passage of your larger vessels, so you'll have to decide whether you want to split your forces or try to send even the light ships through possibly well-protected deep water passes between islands. All-in-all, the gameplay is easy enough for a beginner to grasp, yet elegant enough to appeal to even veteran strategy gamers.

But there's one terrible flaw which ruins the game: the mission difficulty. When the first scenario of the first campaign game concludes, you'll find that in the next scenario you'll be facing an impossible stern chase to the eastern edge of a new map, with some 30 enemy vessels against a ragtag five or so; even if you end the first scenario with no battle damage and capture all enemy vessels, it's hard to see how you can win this second one with the starting conditions as they exist (the first scenarios of the other two campaigns seem equally impossible). I suppose there's some secret or trick to winning these missions, but I couldn't find it; besides, a strategy game shouldn't be about finding the one tricky path to victory.

The multi-player options seem much better balanced: give each player a set amount of money to build ports, forts, and ships, put them on a map, and may the best captain win. But for me, the single player is the major component of gameplay, and it's here that *Admiral* falls down. I really hope Megamedia takes the time to rework the scenarios, because the simple game system could be quite addicting; until then, however, *Admiral* will just have to walk my hard-drive's plank. – *Scott Udell*

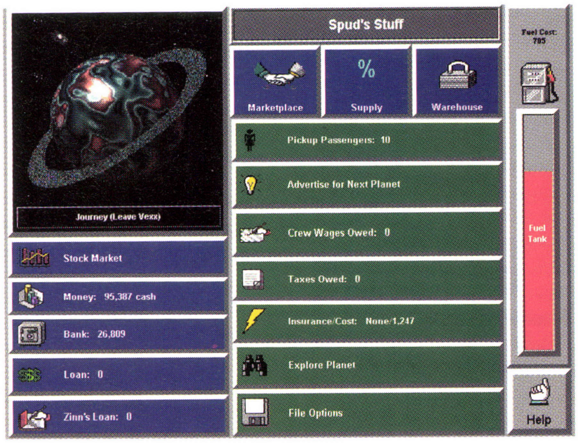
Gazillionaire Deluxe

LavaMind

Windows

★★⯪☆☆

A follow-on to LavaMind's original space "bizness" sim, *Gazillionaire Deluxe* is more of the same; according to the developers they've "basically doubled the number of planets, ships, special events, news events, etc." The premise of the game is simple: go into debt to buy a ship, and try to build up a "bizness" by moving goods between seven wacked-out planets (there are some 14 available, but only seven in one game session; you can choose which ones and their positions, or let the choice be up to the computer). You'll compete against six computer players, and there can be up to six human players (either hot-seat or e-mail), and your goal is to be the first to make a million. Unfortunately, there's no mechanism to



Pickup Passengers: 10

Crew Wages Owed: 0

Taxes Owed: 0

Insurance/Cost: None/1,247

Money: 95,387 cash

Bank: 26,809

Loan: 0

Zinn's Loan: 0

Fuel Cost: 785

Gazillionaire Deluxe

ROAD TO MOSCOW

WWII STRATEGIC OPERATIONS ON THE EASTERN FRONT 1941-1945

Take Command of the Entire German or Russian Army on the Eastern Front During WWII

On June 22, 1941, the German Army unleashed Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union, with almost 140 divisions, including 17 Panzer and 13 motorized units. Opposing the German onslaught were almost 170 divisions, including 32 armored units, of the massive Red Army. What happens next is up to you. Road to Moscow is a state-of-the-art simulation that will test your ability to lead either the German or Red Army to victory on the Eastern Front.

HISTORICALLY ACCURATE ORDERS OF BATTLE

The German and Red Army Order of Battle features thousands of units from corps to company-size. An interactive Table of Organization Browser allows easy access to the historically accurate organization of every unit in the game.

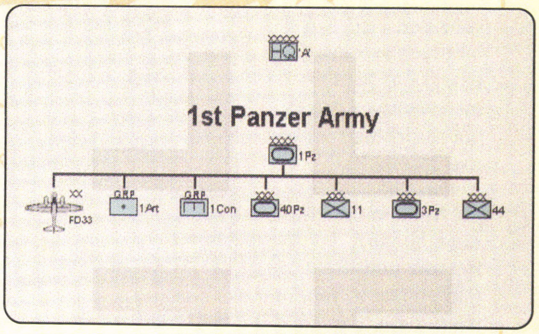
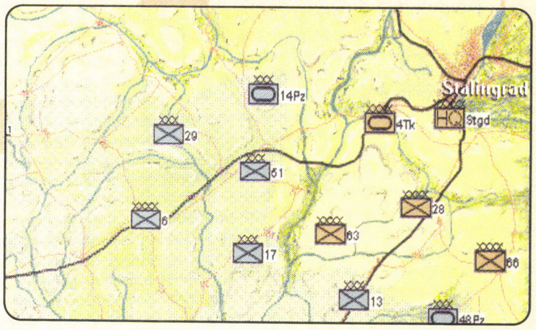


Table of Organization Browser showing 1st Panzer Army

HISTORICALLY ACCURATE BATTLEFIELD MAP

The Road to Moscow battlefield is an actual 1:2,000,000 scale, 256-color, topographical map of the Soviet Union and eastern Poland on June 22, 1941. This map shows over 20,000 historically accurate geographic locations. The scrollable campaign map is the equivalent of 18 full computer screens.



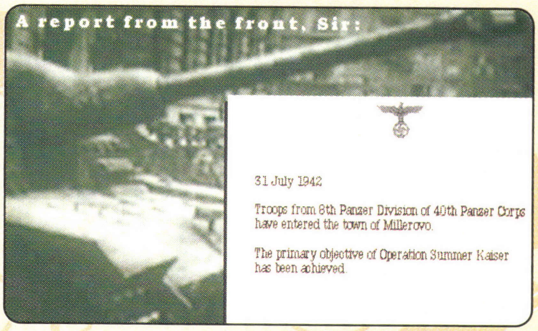
Actual terrain southwest of Stalingrad

HISTORICALLY ACCURATE OPERATIONAL PLANNING

Simply draw your operational plans directly on the game map. Your staff will move troops into position, stockpile supplies, allocate air strikes and artillery support. Watch the progress of your forces on the map and receive a variety of reports from the front as the fighting begins. Road to Moscow includes scenarios based on actual Eastern Front operations by both armies and a 1941-1945 campaign game.

OTHER EXITING FEATURES:

- Generals have individual personalities that affect the performance of the troops under their command.
- Operational plans include phase lines, deception, amphibious and airborne landings, commando raids, and partisan activity.
- An optional political feature that subjects the player's plans to the personal whims of Hitler or Stalin.
- Original CD-quality music and state-of-the-art sound effects.
- Easy-to-use point-and-click interface.



A report from the front, Sir:

31 July 1942

Troops from 8th Panzer Division of 40th Panzer Corps have entered the town of Millerovo.

The primary objective of Operation Summer Kaiser has been achieved.

Report from 8th Panzer Division, 40th Panzer Corps

Playable Windows 95 Demo game at: http://www.arsenalpub.com

Arsenal Publishing

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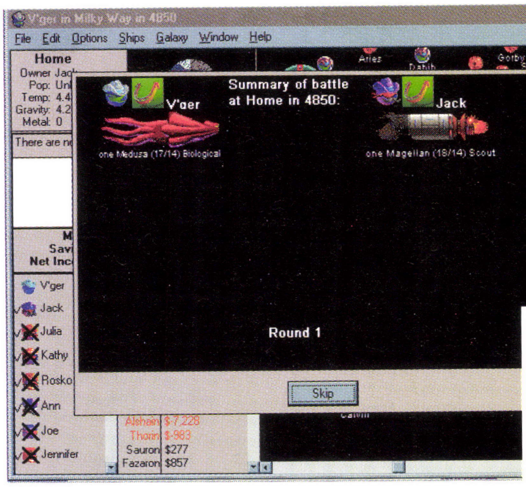
reduce the number of computer players or the profit goal (it can take a long time to make a million; my first game was some 70 or more turns), something I'd want for multiplayer games.

The gameplay has a surprisingly similar feel to their (is)land bizness game *Zapitalism*, but with less depth; once you learn the rules (a very easy process, given their excellent on-line tutorial mode), you'll settle rapidly into a repetitive cycle of movement, planet investigation (news, weather, etc), resupply/bill paying, goods sales, and selection of your next load. Not a lot of replay value for those of us used to more complex games, but surprisingly addictive nonetheless (rather like *Solitaire* for Windows, but with more humor). Because of distribution problems, you might have to go to LavaMind's web site (**www.lavamind.com**) to order the game. Definitely a great game for kids (and a fun introduction to business concepts for anyone), it may nevertheless not have the "legs" needed to keep the attention of the hard-core gamer. *–Scott Udell*



Spaceward Ho! IV

Spaceward Ho! IV

New World Computing

Windows 95

★★★⯨☆

Spaceward Ho! IV is a simple space-conquest game which takes you and nineteen of your friends for a flight of whimsy. An update of *Spaceward Ho! 2*, in this instance New World Computing has pared the build-move-kill-colonize play of the original even further, and added some interesting new options.

You can ally with other players, including the computer, and make deals concerning planets, money, etc. A new "diabolical" level intelligence has been added, as has a new "cluster" galaxy type. Rumors of an option to make metal renewable did not materialize in the final design.

In addition to scouts, fighters, satellites and colony ships there are now dreadnoughts (tremendously expensive in money and metal, yet cheaper than the equivalent number of fighters); tankers which automatically refuel any ships with them (they never run out of juice); decoys (they take almost no metal, making great scouts) and biologicals. Unlike the other new classes, biologicals and decoys are only available after your wacky scientists have discovered them.

Ships still have five stats, but are built immediately on the selected colony. You can go into debt, but you can only go so far down the well, and they charge 15% interest (hey, that's better than some of my credit cards. Hmmm...).

Radical tech has been added to the five ship techs. Periodically, your scientists will present four projects they are working on. One may be canceled. When they come to fruition is less predictable than other techs, but the rewards are greater. Discovering space monsters when you're out of metal will put a smile on any space-emperor's sensory cluster.

In summary, *Spaceward Ho! IV* is more fun than the original. I *love* dreadnoughts and tankers. I wish you could have more than one save, and that you could refuel biologicals with something more practical than your people. I also hope they will give us the proper graphics for our star drives past a certain point, rather than duplicating the weapon graphics, but these are small nits in perhaps the best beer-and-pretzels space 4X game ever. *–Samuel Brown Baker II*

[*New World has notified us that, because of an error at the disc duplicators, the initial batch of* Spaceward Ho! IV *CDs may not work with most older CD-ROM drives; they will be providing free replacement CDs to anyone who has this problem.*]

Broken Alliance

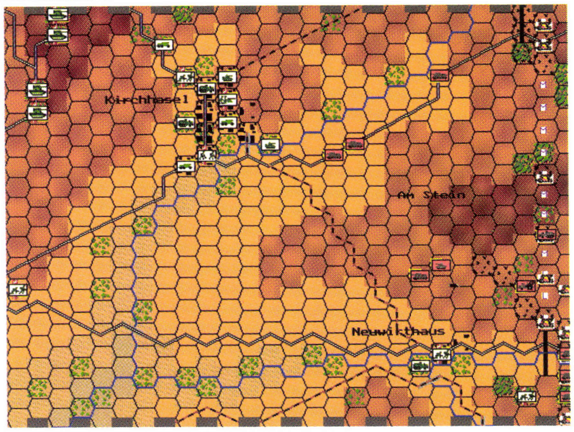
HPS Simulations

DOS

★★★★⯨

With this game HPS Simulations adds a third entry to their series of tactical level combat games which proves a slight change of pace from their previous offerings. While the last two concentrated on the WWII period, this time the topics are the Korean War and a hypothetical confrontation between the West and the Soviet Union in early post-WWII Europe. The latter offers particularly interesting (if historically implausible) possibilities: one of the pre-generated scenarios depicts a combined US/German task force aiding in the breakout of American units encircled by a Soviet offensive. The five Korean War scenarios are all based on actual operations; most are contests between the superiority in materiel enjoyed by the United States, and the hordes of infantry employed by the Chinese and North Koreans.

The game uses the same interface HPS introduced in *Panthers in the Shadows*. Players familiar with this game or *Tigers on the Prowl 2* will have no difficulty jumping right into the thick of the fight. Through the interface you communicate with various sections of your HQ staff, who will provide you with information regarding the combat strengths of your units, their ammunition supply, the length of time it will take for them to respond to your orders, and targeting data. The data are presented in table form, making it easier to grasp the big picture and select your courses of action.



Broken Alliance

The key to guiding your forces to victory is effective command and control. Your instructions are carried through a chain of command; depending on circumstances, a delay of several turns will occur before a unit will respond. HQs are particularly important in getting your forces to operate cohesively: lose your task force HQ and some of your companies may go charging ahead, while others hang back, "waiting for the word."

The game contains an extensive database of hundreds of the weapons available during the 1945-53 period. Perhaps the most valuable resource of this game is a scenario editor, which allows you to build limitless numbers of historical and "what if" situations. This is top-notch tactical simulation of a period largely neglected by the game industry. *Broken Alliance* should be approached by beginners with caution, but hard core gamers will delight in the depth of detail offered here. Recommended! *–Rex Whitfield*

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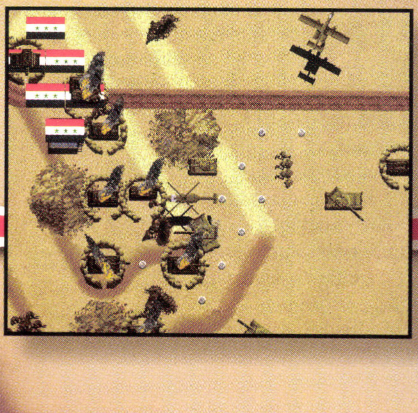
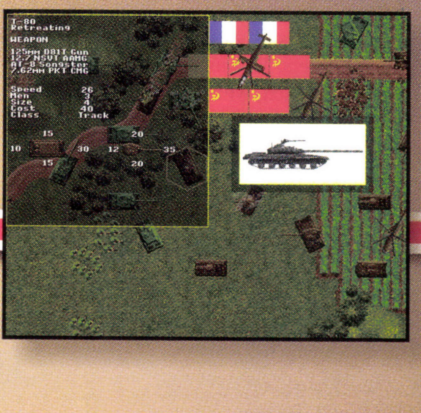
KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB




T-80
Retreating
WEAPON
125mm D81T Gun
12.7 NSVT AAMG
AT-8 Songster
7.62mm PKT CMG
Speed 26
Men 3
Size 4
Cost 40
Class Track
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15
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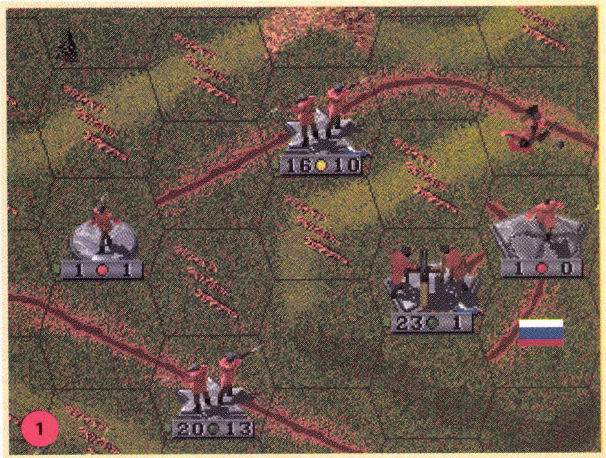
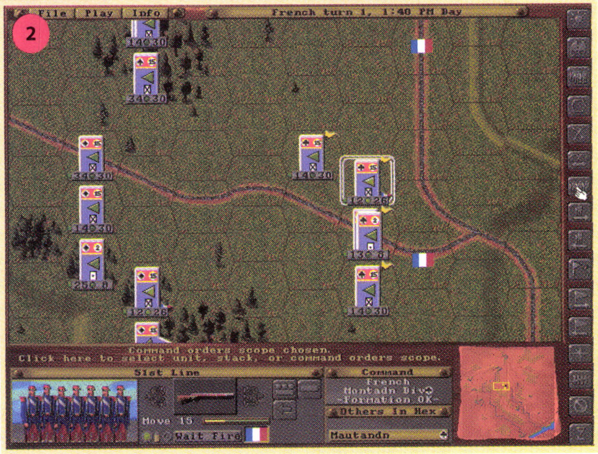
by Tom Chick

Age of Rifles

Part Two: More strategies for the Hundred Years (Ago) War

Last time we looked at the importance of formation and how it changes a unit's effectiveness in combat and movement. This month, we'll take a closer look at the dynamic values which determine how effectively a unit functions. The units in *Age of Rifles* all have the following attributes: experience, training, cohesion, morale, vitality, and capability. SSI doesn't go far in explaining the interaction and management of these attributes, so we'll delve into that here.





Command orders scope chosen.
Click here to select unit, stack, or command orders scope.

[1] The colored dots in the center of the "whallop bar" are a quick and convenient way to check a unit's capability [2] Although not as aesthetically pleasing as the miniatures graphics, the icons graphics are useful for identifying units within a command by their icons (note the spades, diamonds,and clubs)

The most immediate problem is that *Age of Rifles* presents us with broad adjectives rather than numbers. This may be addressed in an upcoming patch, which will give the actual percentages instead of words. Until then, following are the ranges for each adjective:

Excellent	81-100%
Good	61-80%
Fair	41-60%
Poor	21-40%
Very Poor	1-20%

Each army has a set of national averages, which can be adjusted during scenario construction. Of course, some units will deviate significantly from their national averages, which distinguishes elite veterans from the guys scraped from the bottom of the barrel. Refer to the chart for the default values for any given nation.

Capability (The Few the Proud, the Capable)

A unit's capability is the single most important gauge of how well that unit will function. The quickest way to render a unit useless is to let its capability fall. This attribute is used as a percentage modifier to determine fire and melee strengths; it is used to determine the success or failure of melee; it is used when a unit first comes under fire to determine whether the unit is pinned; it is used when a unit takes losses to determine whether the unit retreats, routs or panics; it is used to determine how long it takes to build breastworks, how many stragglers a unit recovers, how soon a routed unit rallies, etc., etc.

Therefore, maximizing a unit's capability is one of the most important aspects of unit management. Capability is determined with the following formula:

$$Cp = Ch(T+E+V+2M)/5$$

Cp= Capability
Ch = Cohesion
T = Training
E= Experience
V = Vitality
M = Morale

Two things are immediately evident here: first, cohesion is extremely important; and second, morale is doubly weighted. Since training and experience are fixed within scenarios, the way to maximize capability is to maintain high numbers for cohesion, morale, and vitality, in that order of importance.

Cohesion (keeping it all together)

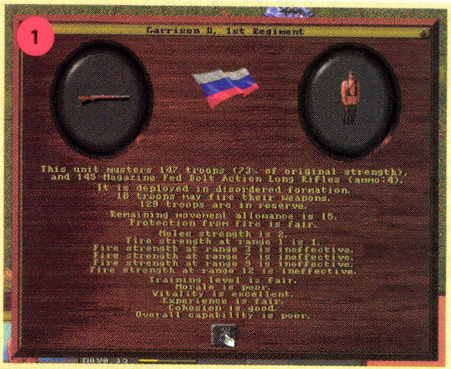
Cohesion is given short shrift in SSI's manual, especially considering how important it is to a unit's capability. It represents the degree

National Averages

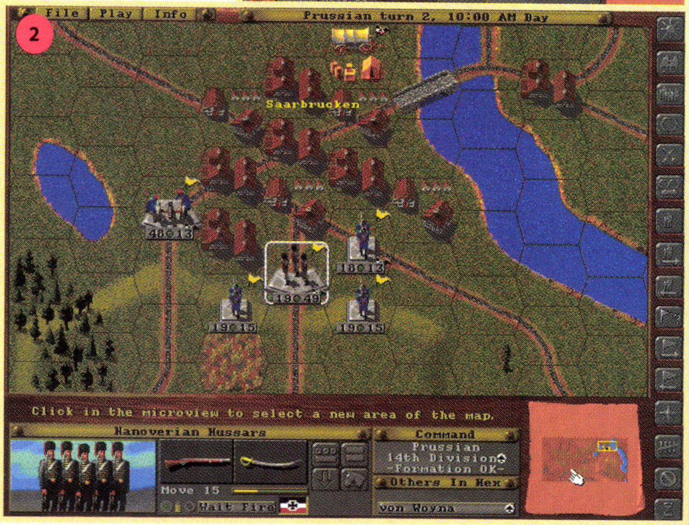
Nationality	Training	Morale	Experience
American	50	60	70
Amerind	10	80	80
Ansar	15	80	60
Argentinian	50	50	60
Austrian	65	60	60
Boer	50	50	60
Brazilian	50	50	60
British	65	70	70
Chilean	50	50	60
Chinese	25	50	50
Columbian	50	50	60
Confederate	50	50	70
French	65	70	60
Greek	50	50	60
Indian	40	50	50
Italian	65	70	60
Japanese	65	70	60
Korean	50	50	60
Mexican	40	50	50
Paraguayan	50	50	60
Peruvian	50	50	60
Prussian	70	70	60
Russian	40	50	50
Spanish	40	50	50
Turkish	40	50	50
Union	50	50	70
Zulu	15	90	90

to which order is maintained within a unit, i.e., its level of internal organization. When a unit takes losses, it loses the corresponding percentage in cohesion. For example, consider a 100-man unit with a cohesion of 80; if it loses 10 men (10% of 100), it will lose 8 points of cohesion (10% of 80) and become a 90-man unit with a cohesion of 72. A unit recovers a percentage of its lost cohesion equal to its…ready for this?…capability. If a unit's capability is below 30%, it still recovers 30% of its lost cohesion each turn.

Managing cohesion means being careful about accruing too many casualties too quickly. If a unit is heavily hit, consider having it sit out of the battle for a while to let its cohesion build up. Otherwise, further losses will compound the problem by lowering cohesion *and* capability. A steady stream of losses will lead quickly into a vicious circle of plummeting capability: reduced cohesion leads to reduced capability which leads to slower cohesion recovery which leads to reduced capability.



This unit musters 147 troops (73% of original strength),
and 145 Magazine Fed Bolt Action Long Rifles (ammo:4).
It is deployed in disordered formation.
18 troops may fire their weapons.
129 troops are in reserve.
Remaining movement allowance is 15.
Protection from fire is fair.
Melee strength is 2.
Fire strength at range 1 is 1.
Fire strength at range 3 is ineffective.
Fire strength at range 7 is ineffective.
Fire strength at range 9 is ineffective.
Fire strength at range 12 is ineffective.
Training level is fair.
Morale is poor.
Vitality is excellent.
Experience is fair.
Cohesion is good.
Overall capability is poor.



Click in the microview to select a new area of the map.

Morale (The Happy Hussar)

Morale is a bit less scientific. There is no clear cut and simple formula for determining morale loss and recovery. Basically, units who suffer bad combat effects lose morale. This is particularly true for units who do poorly in a melee situation. Units who see other units suffer bad combat effects also lose morale. Killed or wounded leaders will cause further morale losses. Morale is probably the least "hands-on" of the attributes determining capability; think of it as more a by-product of success or failure than an attribute. Assuming you use your units well, they will be successful, and your morale will stay high.

More than cohesion and vitality, morale losses are hard to regain. Morale is raised when participating in a successful melee, so if you can find a weakened enemy unit and beat up on it, you're likely to get a morale boost. Barring that, even just seeing an enemy unit take heavy losses or rout can raise morale. Finally, if a unit is below its default morale level, it will receive a random increase based on its vitality. So a well-rested unit will recover morale more quickly than an exhausted unit.

Vitality (bright-eyed and bushy tailed)

Vitality is probably the easiest attribute to control, but it also has a relatively minor impact compared to cohesion and morale. The rule with vitality is to never drive a unit into its "forced march" range (i.e. where the movement point gauge is drained down into the yellow area) two turns in a row. Vitality recovers quickly and regularly if you don't abuse it. If, however, you have to drive a unit hard enough to start incurring vitality losses (which are immediately apparent when your unit doesn't receive its full movement point allowance at the beginning of a turn), the best way to recover is to remove the unit safely away from combat and rest it in disorganized formation.

Command (command performance)

Finally, the presence of a leader can modify a unit's capability. If the unit's capability is lower than the leader's, the following formula is used:

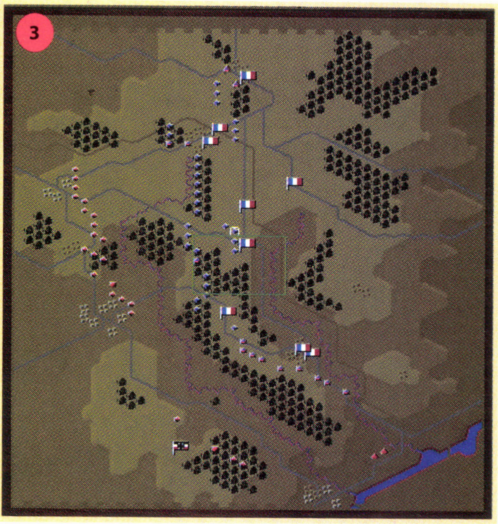
$$Cp = (U+2L)/3$$

Cp = capability
U = unit capability
L = leader capability

It can work wonders to attach a good leader to an abused unit. It will recover cohesion (and thus capability) faster, and will fare better in combat situations. However, be careful about attaching leaders to units too far from the rest of their unit. A unit within five hexes of its command's leader has a 100% chance of being "in command". This percentage chance decreases proportionately with distance down to 0% past 20 hexes. Sub-command leaders have a 100% chance out to three hexes, decreasing to zero past 12 hexes. Note that the percentage chances to remain "in command" are modified by darkness, bad weather, and terrain, so in the worst of conditions, it's possible a unit within the minimum command radius could find itself isolated.

By using the Command Orders scope when issuing orders, it's easier to keep units together, especially in the early stages of a scenario, when each side is jockeying for position. This will keep units from being inadvertently isolated, and will maintain overlapping fields of fire when enemy units get close enough to be attacked. As I mentioned last time, *Age of Rifles* is like chess in some ways, and lessons learned in chess about interlocking power structures will certainly apply here. Just don't forget that here you're dealing with pawns which have morale, and knights which have cohesion! ■

[1] Look for these adjectives to be replaced with actual percentages in SSI's next patch [2] This overview of the Franco-Prussian encounter at Gravelotte illustrates the chess-like nature of 19th century warfare. Keep your units' structures intact to maintain command and set up interlocking fields of fire
[3] Maneuvering these units in Command Orders scope will make your job (and theirs) easier in the earlier stages of the game

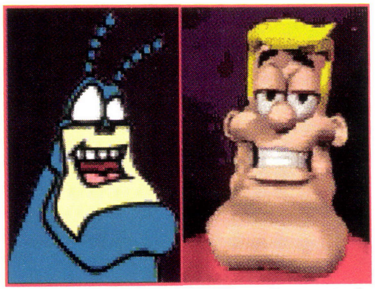


by Steve Bauman

Cheat Thrills

The marketing of a mascot

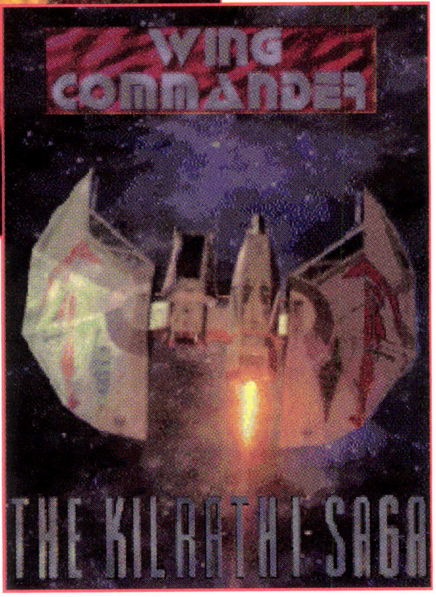
It never amazes to cease me how bizarre the video and computer game world is. Or maybe it's just my world, because I was sitting around watching TV one day (it's the fuzzy looking box in the corner of your living room, the one you haven't touched since you hopped on that information superhighway thing). I saw this commercial which sort of stood out. It was so… crass.


The Tick and Captain Quazar. Separated at birth?

There's this guy in a weird animal suit driving to the Nintendo headquarters in Seattle. He hops out the car and says, "Hey plumber boy, mustache man. Your worst nightmare has arrived" and proceeds to tell us how great his game, *Crash Bandicoot* is. After being kicked out of the parking lot (ooh, he's a rebel), it's all over and you're left going, "Wow, that's one cool bandicoot."

Enter the surreal world of marketing. One of the first criticisms of Sony's PlayStation is that it lacked a mascot. Nintendo has Mario and Sega has Sonic the Hedgehog. The PlayStation lacked a character who would make people run out immediately and buy more machines. The marketing brains at Sony, bless their little hearts, decided Crash would be it. We'd have Crash games. Crash TV shows. Crash dolls. Whatever. The only problem with their brilliant plan is that they forgot the game. The game *Crash Bandicoot* is pathetic, compared with Nintendo's *Super Mario 64*. We'll see if Crash appears on next year's Saturday morning lineup.

▲ **The highly marketed but somewhat dull Crash Bandicoot**



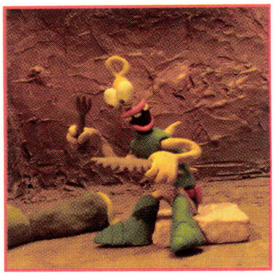
▶ **Blast off with Bluehair in the Wing Commander Windows 95 rehash**

Since I possess no marketing skills whatsoever (obviously), I'm going to ask you, dear readers, to determine whether or not the PC needs a mascot. If so, who shall it be? Obvious choices would be Duke Nukem, "The Doom Guy®," or "The Quake Guy®." Earthworm Jim and Captain Quazar are kind of cool, but they're console guys slumming on the PC (did you ever notice how much the Captain looks like the coolest Saturday morning superhero, The Tick?). How about Bill Gates? Nah, he's too much of a stereotypical nerd. Plus, he probably plays *Final Doom* for Windows 95 instead of *Quake*.

Maybe the PC mascot should be Blair, from the *Wing Commander* games. If you're curious about the, uh, origin of his name, check out Origin's *Wing Commander: The Kilrathi Saga*, a Windows 95 re-release of the first three games in the series. What's really great about the games is that, even on a Pentium, you can experience the originals just like they were on a low-end 386.

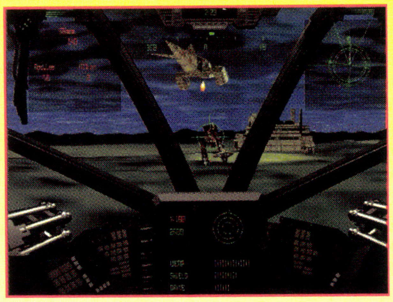
Back to Blair. His name is a shortening of Blue Hair, which is what they, for reasons only known to Origin artists, managed to give the main character before the game went full-motion video on us (he later became Mark Hamill and became even more of a wimp, though he lost the blue hair and gained some stubble). Ah, forget that Blair guy. How about Maniac, as played by Tom Wilson?

How about Guybrush Threepwood? Too wordy. Ben, from *Full Throttle*? Possibly. Commander Zod from *Z*? Keep trying. My vote goes to Willie Trombone from *The Neverhood*. He's cooler than Crash because he doesn't try to be cool. He too dumb to be cool. Plus he has a hole in his head, which should make him easier to hang on display racks for your kids to buy at the local Wal-Mart.


Willie Trombone

But seriously (and this is serious stuff), we need a mascot. Sony couldn't live without one. How can the PC possibly survive the 90's without one? Hurry. Operators are standing by. ■

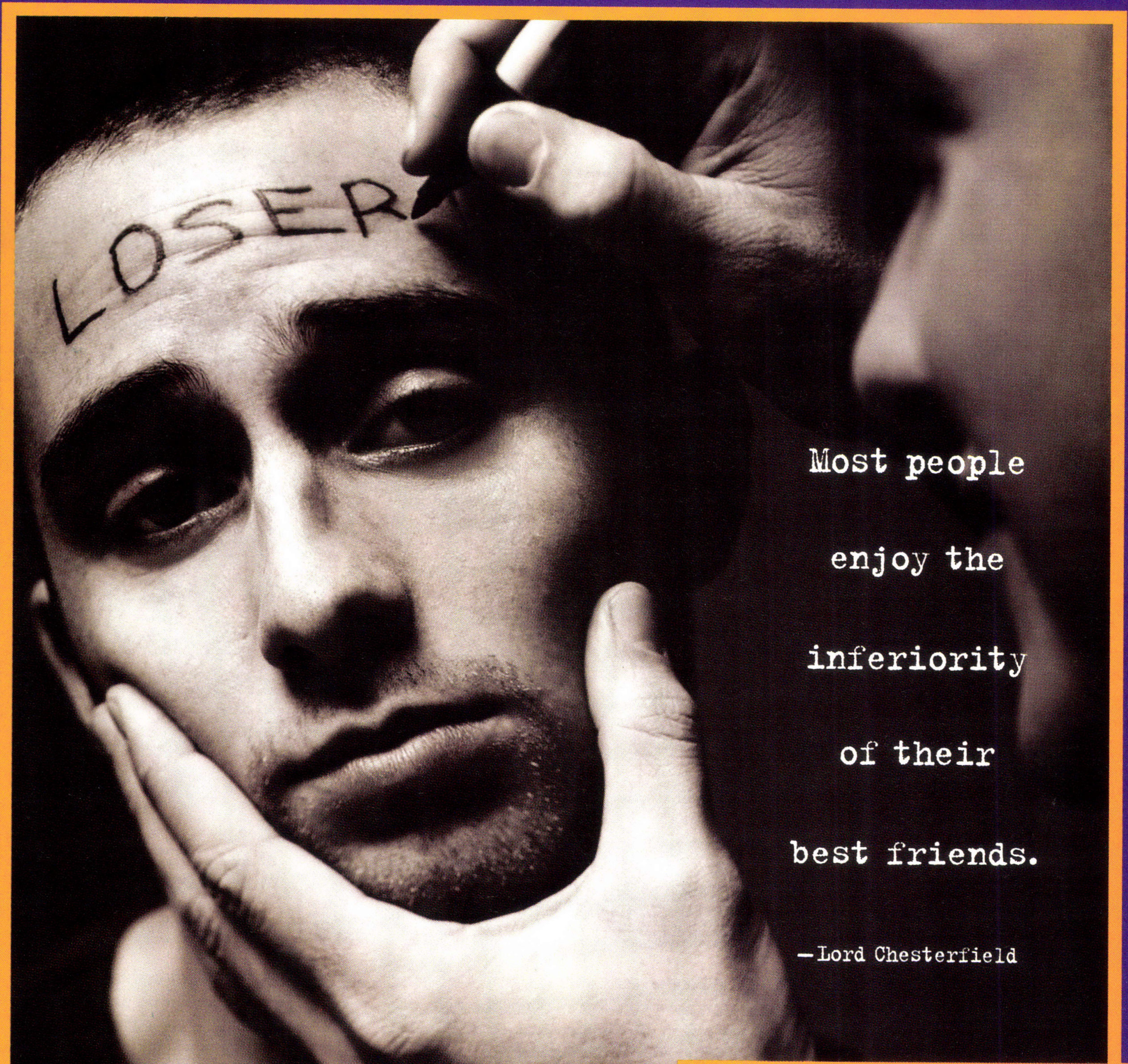
Cheater

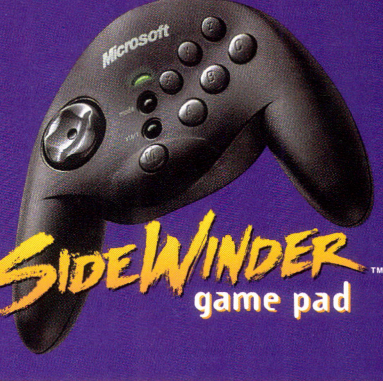


Shattered Steel

Codes for better 'bot blasting

lockandload	all weapons
imouttahere	wins mission
chernobyl	nuke
smite	destroys target
ragnarok	blows head off 'bot
gonzales	speed up
capone	spawns five gnats
henchman	spawns shiva
rodrigo	spawns choppers
cleese	weird animation
monkeyslunch	weird textures


LOSER
Most people enjoy the inferiority of their best friends.
—Lord Chesterfield



Compete head-to-head. Surrender nothing.

The Microsoft® SideWinder™ game pad makes it a fair fight for you and up to three of your best friends. Hook up to any of your Windows® 95-based games and all four (or three, or two) of you get the same fully functional, lightning-fast game control and multibutton maneuvers. So no matter how many are plugged in, the competition's still quick and exciting. It's a perfect fit for hands of all sizes, letting you keep a solid grip and making it easier to use any of the buttons or triggers to vanquish your opponents. Record complicated, hard-to-remember multibutton moves and map them to a single button for swift execution of lethal maneuvers. Remember, the more SideWinder game pads you own, the more friends you can take advantage of. A little friendly competition never hurt anyone, right?

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An explosive classic

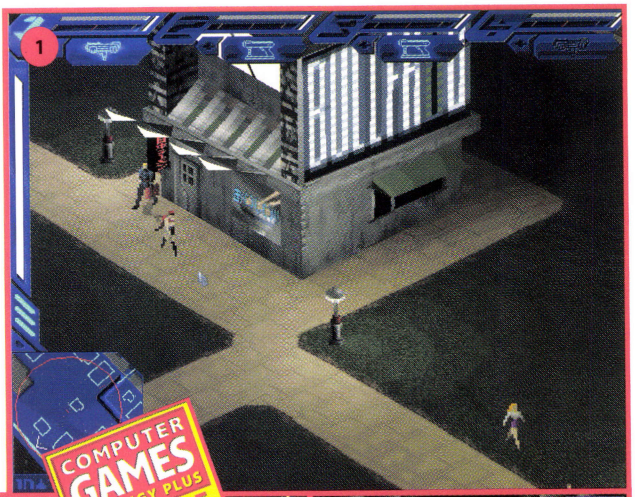
Syndicate Wars

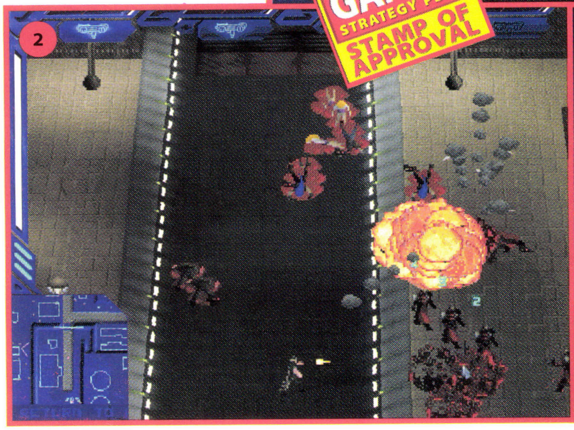
Bullfrog

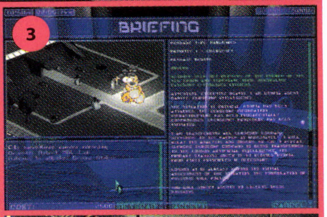
DOS

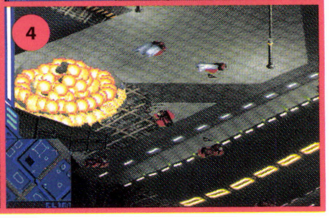
★★★★★

[1] Dynamic real-time lighting adds a lot of atmosphere to the game. The pixellated denizens of the city have received the brunt of the game's criticism; they're blocky, but consider the speed hit of literally hundreds of hi-res sprites running around a 3D terrain **[2]** Our trench-coated heroes walk away from a particularly nasty and bloody fight **[3]** The mission briefings should be familiar to players of the original **[4]** Be on the lookout for seemingly random explosions. This one took out some Church of the New Epoch guys, as well as the entire Syndicate squad









COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

If you consider yourself a hardcore gamer, and have been disappointed with one aspect or another of most of the software released lately, look no further; you've found your match here. To put it simply, *Syndicate Wars* is one damn fine game. It's also one tough game. Sure, there are easy missions; but no matter how good you are, you'll eventually run into one which stops you cold for a good while. Most of the time in gaming, this is a bad thing; not here.

Too often in a game, particularly an arcade game, you have to fight your way through a level over and over again. The first twenty times this is okay, if you're used to the drill. It's a form of practice; you learn the subtleties through repetition the same way you would in any other skill-based activity. The difference between having fun during this process and being bored silly, however, depends on how much care has been taken with all the dynamic and static elements present in the game. Do you catch interesting new possibilities the next time through which your eye hadn't noticed previously? Is the rhythm of play balanced enough that you can, over time, look closely and figure out some new tricks in the middle of the hot action? If you have to repeat a level or section or mission over and over again, is there enough there, even in the background, to maintain your interest the twentieth time through? If the answer to any of these questions is no, the game's in trouble.

The answer to all of 'em for this game, however, is a resounding yes. In fact, there's so much going on in any particular mission that the habits developed playing most arcade games are likely to serve you poorly here. Your usual inclination to fight your way through the mission to get on to the business of the next one will force you to miss a good half of what's on offer.

This is true for the game at two levels; first, there are always a number of different ways to achieve the goals of the mission, no matter how apparently narrowly defined (kill everything in sight, or use your indoctrinator to assemble a crack, hard-core team of cops and punks, equip them and then work through a highly challenging real-time tactical game in 3D; both work). And second, there's stuff in each mission which has nothing to do with your main goal but which is interesting to explore anyway.

Here's a simple example of the latter, discussed online early after the game's release. You complete the first mission. You find a view screen on a podium just south of your starting point. Turn the indoctrinator on it, and a game of *Breakout* starts. Complete all 10 levels and you win a prize (upgrades for your agents). Sure, it could take you two hours to accomplish this task, but isn't it interesting it's there? And it's just one of many.

Players know, of course, from our preview that one of the most visually spectacular aspects of the game is the explosions. Literally every building and vehicle in the game is destructible; heck, you can even park a vehicle near a building and then blow *it* up to blow up the building, *Die Hard with a Vengeance* style (good technique for robbing banks). Sometimes, a punk will take you and the rest of a city block down with him (or her) in a vast, nuclear explosion if you don't exterminate quickly. All of this is beautifully animated, in fluid detail, and again, with perfect balance for the style of the game.

Beyond the explosions, though, this is the first game ever to offer a fully 3D environment *which you can rotate at will*. This seems like a small point, but the ability to change your perspective on your team, with dynamic rendering of buildings blocking your view so that they go transparent if they're in the way (yet still remain visible in outline form) is no small programming feat. More importantly, it lends the game an almost cinematic feel (and simple control over same), one which many sophisticated action sports simulations would do quite well to emulate. You'll have as much fun rotating around your team, to get a closer flash view of these mean streets, as you will actually playing the game.

The perspective on the game world taken here is itself nothing new – we've seen it in everything from Will Harvey's *The Immortal* to the *Crusader* games from Origin – and the gameplay itself is familiar enough to people who've played *Populous*, *Powermonger* and the original *Syndicate* that it will be quick to get into. What makes the game world fresh, however, is its incredible dynamism; literally *everything* in each of the included missions can be interacted with in some way (use it or abuse it, depending on the situation), and the citizens, cops, punks, agents and other denizens of each scenario all follow their own different drummers (sometimes even after being indoctrinated; watch out if you start losing a big firefight in a dark alley).

The individual mission designs are clever and quite focused, yet the means to achieve the set goals are varied and often quite complex. Use your best tactical thinking here instead of bulling your way through. Best of all, though, once you complete a mission's goals, you're not automatically booted out of the mission. Earlier Bullfrog titles have featured such things as extra secret levels, special extra powers or add-ons for your character etc. available only *after* finishing a mission/scenario, and that's true here as well. Spend plenty of time looking around, exploring, involving yourself in the game world of each mission before moving on, and you'll discover plenty more to do.

Forget the beautifully animated (VGA or SVGA, depending on your hardware) 3D world, the fantastic graphics and sound, the clever mission design, the dynamism of all the game's elements, the near-perfect play balance, though, and you'd still have an amazing game. The cascading relationships between your agents and the populations in each mission are as sophisticated as Bullfrog has ever made them. Simply focusing on how to indoctrinate/persuade your way towards your initial team, then on how to firefight your way to a team with developed skills, enhanced weaponry, then over time, from mission to mission, on how to develop your own agents' powers and equipment, is an epic gaming experience in and of itself.

Syndicate Wars is probably one of *the* games, period. A classic, with enough to enjoy to last a long, long time. Highly recommended. – *Steve Wartofsky*

HyperBlade

Activision

DOS, Windows 95

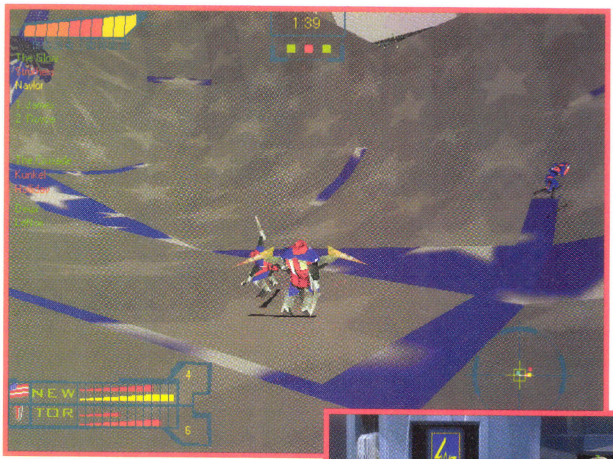
★★★☆☆

Does a 3D version of the classic *Speedball 2* sound fun? If you don't remember that one, it was a 2D overhead game which owed a lot to the movie *Rollerball;* it was a cross between hockey and roller derby. Here's the modern version: *HyperBlade*, a brutal and violent game full of decapitating action and severed arteries. Plop four players and two goalies into a drome, drop a "rok" projectile in there, throw a bunch of weird power-up objects and jumps at them and let them beat the hell out of each other while trying to score a goal, rupturing spleens and crushing larynxes in the process (score a goal with your teammate's severed head for extra fun).

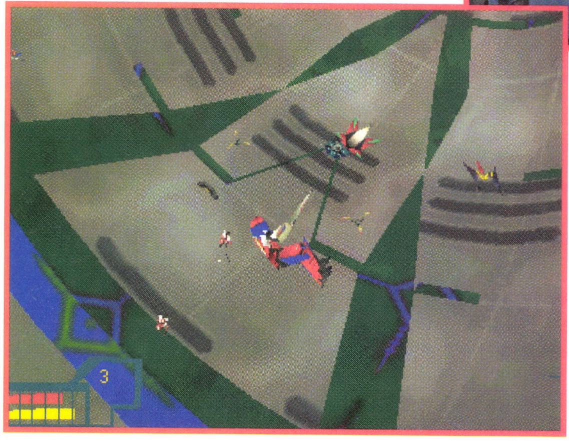
Visually speaking, static screenshots do not do this game justice. It may look like a mass of polygons, but in motion it looks incredible. Even the non-3D accelerated version is a marvel of motion-captured beauty (but the Direct3D version, now we're talking...). There's a fluidity to the movement few games have achieved, with the skaters moving their arms in rhythmic motion as they skate; watch also as they fly around when they get whacked up side the head.

However, once you get beyond the visuals the gameplay holes start appearing; just a few at first, but then they start increasing to the point where you're left with a game which is moderately entertaining but ultimately dissatisfying and disappointing. As a pseudo-sports game, *HyperBlade* omits a large number of features typical for the genre. True league play would have been an excellent addition; a "gauntlet" mode is substituted, but serves instead as a fighting game-style battle against all teams. Trading, free agent signings, diminishing skill for players after serious injuries and things like this could have given the game a lot more long-term playability.

While it's evident the game makes use of basic physics (*i.e.* hitting a wall while skating at top speed will launch you back further than if you barely run into it), you do not generate more speed when you skate down the sides of the dome. Of course, the opposite should be true as well; lose speed up, gain it coming down. As it stands now, the game may as well take place in a flat drome, though if this were the case, you'd lose the slick animations of the guys doing mid-air flips.



HyperBlade



HyperBlade also has a number of technical problems which range from the annoying (the improper detection of certain 3D hardware) to the infuriating (lock-ups, collision detection problems, disappearing roks and weird substitution problems). The last is hard to duplicate, but occurred more than once during review. You'll lose control of players for the duration of a quarter, for instance, if you substitute right when a goal is scored. They'll stand around waiting for the ball to be put into play (meanwhile, the game goes on around you and you can't switch players or do anything, just watch in frustration).

A bigger problem with the game is that it's too easy. After a few games on the easy level, scores averaging around 25 to 1 are common. On the "all-star" level, the scores drop all the way to 10-2. The problem is that the computer goalies are too easy to fake out; attack with a teammate slightly ahead of you and they'll always be drawn to the first player who approaches (apparently they can't tell who has the rok). Let your teammate draw the goalie and score every time.

LOS ANGELES
5
T34
MOSCOW
1
A.I.R
ALIEN IMPLANT REMOVAL
Save up to 40% on alien implant removal
game info?

On the harder levels, the computer has impossibly quick reactions, but you can just do flips off the side walls next to the goal, causing the goalie to pursue you and do a flip himself, and score right when you land. What's unfortunate about these AI problems is that they overshadow the fact that WizBang!, the developers of the game, have crafted AI routines specific to each team. The lumbering Leeds team tries to bore you to death with their slow play, while Chicago will beat the crap out of you (they took out the entire Los Angeles team in one game).

Overall, *HyperBlade* is really close to being something special. With a bit more polish, this version could have been one of the better action games of the year. In its current form it's entertaining, and at times awe-inspiring, but only in the short-term. After a few games it grows tiresome, due to its lack of challenge and bothersome gameplay quirks. However, it has so much potential it makes you long for next year's model. – *Steve Bauman*

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

Necrodome

Mindscape

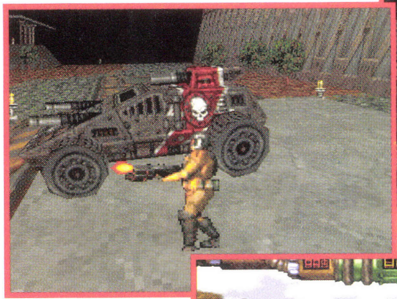
Windows 95

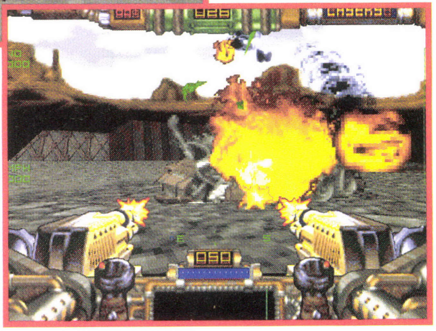
★★★★☆

Just when you thought there was nothing but boring rehash in the overworked first person shooter genre, Raven (the maker of *Heretic* and *Hexen*) comes up with *Necrodome*. It would be easy to dismiss this game as "*Doom* in a Car," proceed to have nightmarish flashbacks of *Quarantine*, and run screaming in the opposite direction from the terror of it all. But if you did, you'd be missing one of the slickest action games around.

The plot is, as usual, secondary and has something to do with a sadistic future where the only real entertainment is the Necrodome tournament – a bristlingly violent, bloody, lethal gameshow of sorts where the contenders take the controls of armed and armored Humvees in an attempt to blast their way through a small army of goons, guns, tanks and other unpleasant bad things in order to retrieve the flag, which is hidden somewhere within the arena. As overused as the sadist gameshow theme is, it hardly matters with *Necrodome*. Capture the Flag was never like this before.

Most of the time the cockpit of the car is the main viewpoint in the game, but you can exit your vehicle at any time. If your car is destroyed, you'll find yourself on foot as well. The option to play the game from both a driver's and a *Doom* perspective adds a lot here, especially since the control is exceptional. It really feels like you're behind the wheel of an armored vehicle, and the playability is dead-on. It will likely take several tries to really get the feel of the controls (though Runner mode, when you are outside the vehicle, controls just like *Doom*), but it's well worth the effort.





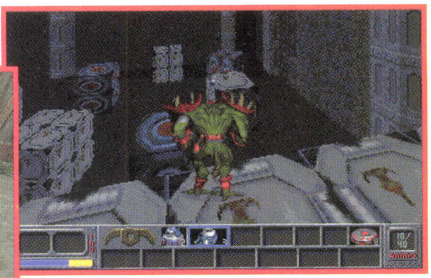
▲ ▶ **Necrodome**

Graphically, *Necrodome* is pretty good. To use the hi-res mode, you will need some serious video processing muscle (as usual) and whether in low or high resolution, the scenery isn't exactly picturesque. The arenas have a decent 3D quality to them and you can bash into and run down the many obstacles strewn around, including, of course, the people. Levels are smartly designed to take advantage of both driver and runner modes, and completing most of these will require a pretty high level of what goes for strategy in this genre. The music and sound effects are well done, including the inevitable "splat!" sound of a particularly nasty hit and run.

Your vehicle is equipped with two different guns, one of which is an auto-aiming turret which automatically locks on nearby targets. You can also take manual control of the turret if you feel the need. Power-ups are placed throughout the arenas, some hidden, some accessible only by foot and many just lying on the roadside. Both your car's main gun and the turret have three different weapon types that they can be switched to if you have the ammo. The weapons range from lasers to rocket launchers, but an even broader choice of armaments would have been nice (like a flame thrower). On foot, you only have one weapon, which was rather absurd.

Necrodome is a Windows 95-only title, requiring DirectX drivers, and includes support for modem play, a four-player network game and the TEN Internet gaming service (untested). There was no direct Internet option, which is an unfortunate omission. There are some interesting multiplayer game options, though. In cooperative mode, if two players enter the same vehicle, one becomes the driver, the other controls the turret. The game offers team play, free for all deathmatches, and cooperative play against the arena. And it must be said that vehicular destruction will always be a perfect medium for a multiplayer game.

Necrodome is simply a blast to play. If you're an action lover, then this is a game that should keep you enthralled for hours. The premise may be overused and unoriginal, but great control, good presentation, well designed levels, and an extremely high body and gore count make *Necrodome* a fast-paced, brutal and bloody action fest that is highly recommended. *–Jason D'Aprile*



▲ **Eradicator**

Eradicator

Accolade

DOS

★★★½☆

In the gaming business, it's getting quite a bit harder to make a good first impression. With the sheer volume of titles, making yours stand out from the pack has forced publishers to go for the lowest common denominator and focus on the thing gamers claim not to care about: visuals. If that demo doesn't have eye-popping visuals, the online whiners can turn people away from your game in droves. When looking at the 3D action genre, how your game compares to the two biggies, *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Quake* will likely determine the success of your game.

Eradicator doesn't compare favorably, visually speaking, to either game. 3D fetishists will bad-mouth the engine for not being *Quake*-like, *Duke Nukem*-like, or whatever. The 3D engine is passable, lacking a high-resolution mode (which you'd think it could handle, considering its relative simplicity). It is a fast engine; it arguably runs too fast on a Pentium machine, but its fluidity will cause you to hearken back to the days of *Doom*. Unfortunately, the sound effects are uninspiring, and the voice performances are even worse.

As a design, *Eradicator* is derivative, taking the multiple characters from *Heretic* and *Hexen* (but adding unique missions for each), the mission-based structure and mouse control from *Terminator: Future Shock* and the interaction with the environment from *Duke Nukem 3D*. Also from *Duke* is the inclusion of a complete level editor, and like all of the games (minus *Terminator*), full network play is supported, though no *Quake*-style client/server or direct Internet play is present.

One thing *Eradicator* makes use of is an optional third-person viewpoint. It's something of a mixed bag; you may find yourself switching to first-person for most of the game. The reason is obvious. All third-person games have to track the player while avoiding obstacles, and *Eradicator*'s "Smart Camera," like almost every other game's, is anything but. The camera still finds itself blocking the view and the switches to first-person if you're too close to the wall is very disorienting.

The game's pseudo-mission structure sounds more impressive than it really is, as the level design forces the player on a linear path. Later levels, though, incorporate many more puzzle-like elements, which elevate the game above yet another "find key to open door" game.

What's unusual about *Eradicator* is that, despite its derivative nature and primitive visuals, it works. It's hard to put a finger on exactly why, but it provides further proof that solid execution is better than outright innovation. It falls short of being a violent *Super Mario 64*, but it's obvious the designers wanted to go beyond the usual *Doom* clone, and bestowed upon the game the features they really liked from the competition. Most designs of this nature turn into an incoherent mess; with *Eradicator*, this approach makes the game feel familiar, one that conjures up the positive things you associate with the games it evokes. *–Steve Bauman*

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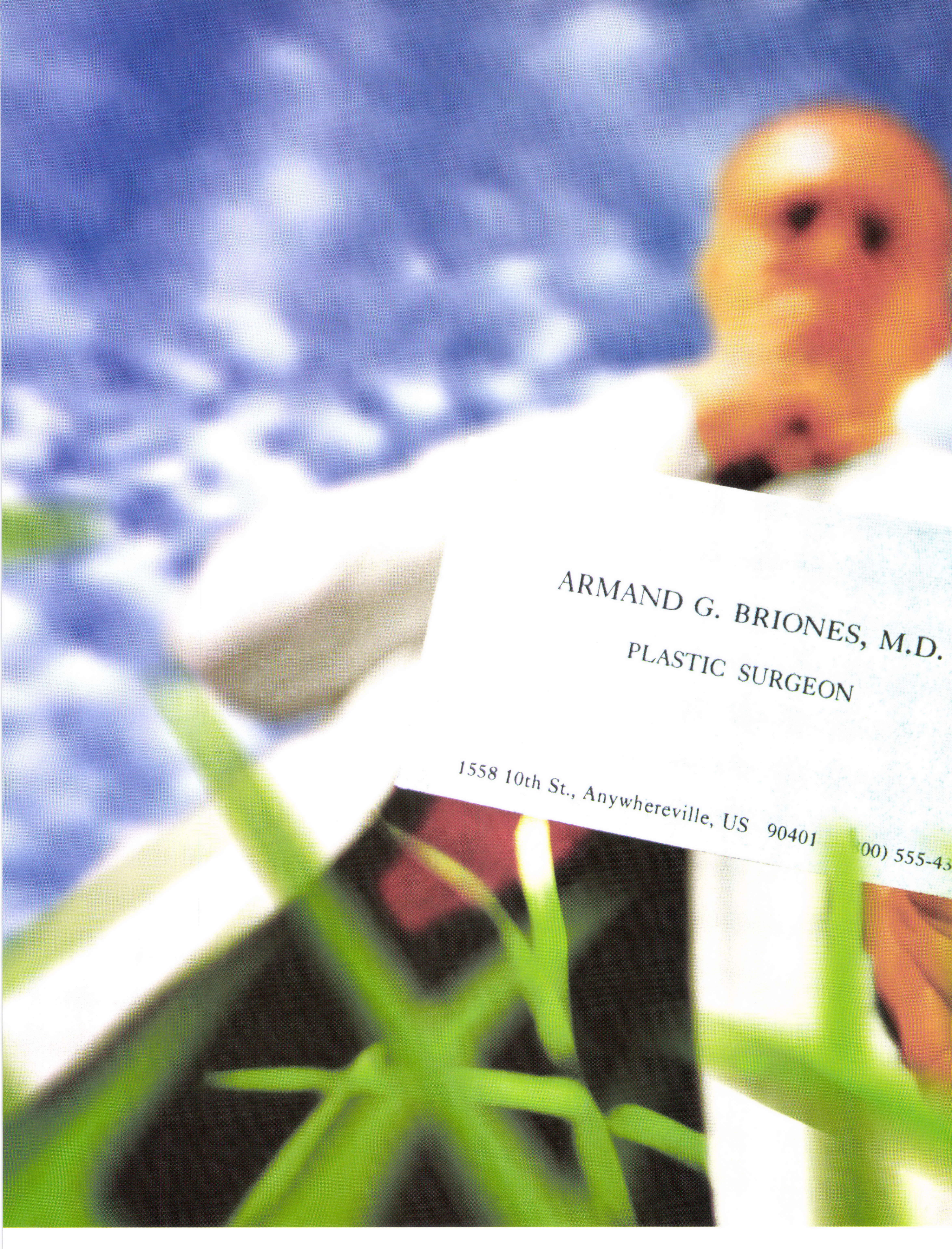
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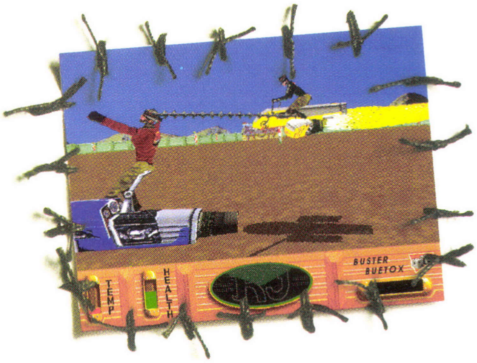
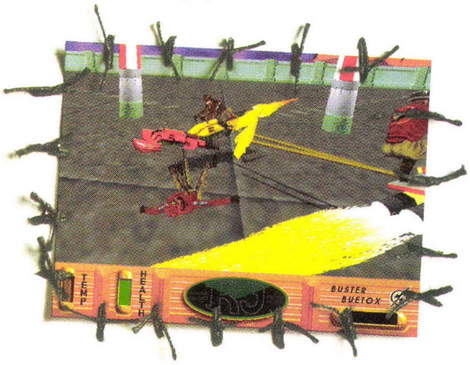
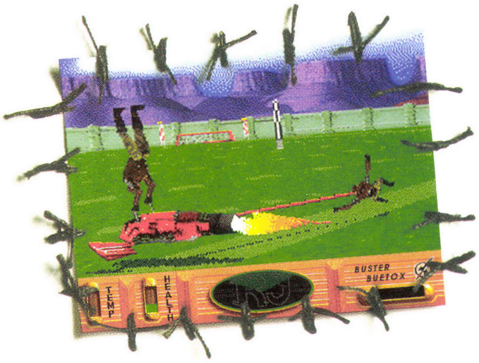


PATIENT 33-S: Received multiple treatments for injuries sustained while participating in "Rocket War." Reconstructive surgery corrected most facial bones destroyed by repeated encounters with rockets, cement walls and pylons. Skin grafts from buttocks region replaced epidermal tissue burned off by jet exhaust.



PATIENT 4-0: Treated for severe lacerations received when he was knocked off his rocket by competitor's cable while "Rocket Racing." Rhinoplasty and ear reconstruction were also necessary, as patient's face was smashed repeatedly against the ground and walls while traveling in excess of 100 mph.



PATIENT 98-B: Treated for massive head trauma suffered after ramming his rocket into an exploding ball while playing "Rocket Ball." The accident completely welded his eye sockets shut and tore 90% of the skin off his face. Needless to say, this was no ordinary "lift and tuck."

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KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Screamer 2

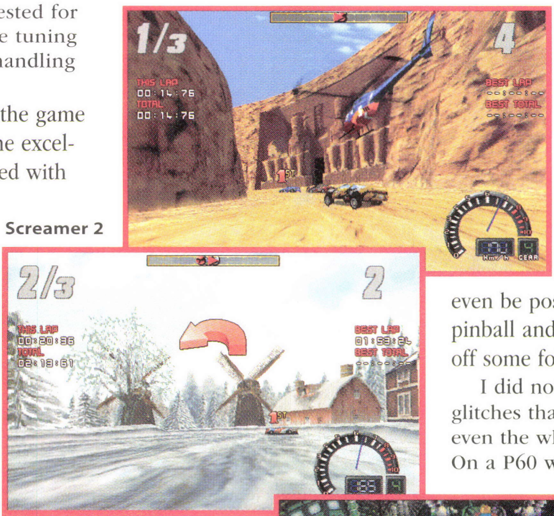
Virgin

DOS

★★★½☆

When Porsche introduced the 911 Turbo back in 1977, it unleashed a car so powerful and dangerous that it – not the Corvair – should have been described as "unsafe at any speed." Its fatal flaw was the combination of a rear mounted engine, a turbocharger with ungodly turbo lag, and a primitive suspension. If you got on or off the throttle in the middle of a turn you'd be ready to join the cast of "Spin City."

After playing *Screamer 2* for a while, you have to wonder whether the developers used their royalties from the prequel to buy a few 911s. The game's car model is loose, loose, loose; the pseudo-911 is almost impossible to drive. The four wheel drive vehicle, on the other hand (looking uncannily like the Toyota Celica All-Trac), gives the game an excellent *Sega Rally* sort of feel. And it's in the feel of the game that *Screamer 2* makes its greatest leap in quality from the original. It's a solid arcade car model, with enough simulation to keep even *IndyCar* fans interested for a while (though the tuning options make the handling even worse).



Screamer 2

Once in motion, the game is a blast to play. The excellent visuals combined with well designed tracks make the racing challenging, perhaps *too* challenging. *Screamer 2* can be an infuriating game, as it obviously cheats by taking an active role in controlling the competition. On the easier levels, falling behind in a race causes the cars ahead of you to act as if they were actually moving *backwards* on the track (it's amazing how fast you can catch up). The early laps of a race become irrelevant, because you'll always be in the race. The opposite happens as well; the computer cars will always be positioned right on your tail, not making any mistakes of their own, so driving a perfect race will not be rewarded if you make a minor slip-up in the last turn. This latter problem makes the game supremely hard, even on the wimpiest levels.

To single out *Screamer 2* for this design decision would be unfair. *Need for Speed* has the same problem, as do most arcade racing games. It makes sense for the arcade, since in that environment the designers don't want you to get *too* frustrated; they want your money again, so it's important to make you feel like you were *that* close to winning, most of the time. *Screamer 2*'s absolute adherence to all things *Ridge Racer*, though, makes you wish these guys would leave the arcade and maybe go outside; even so, it's still one of the better arcade racing games on the market. – *Steve Bauman*

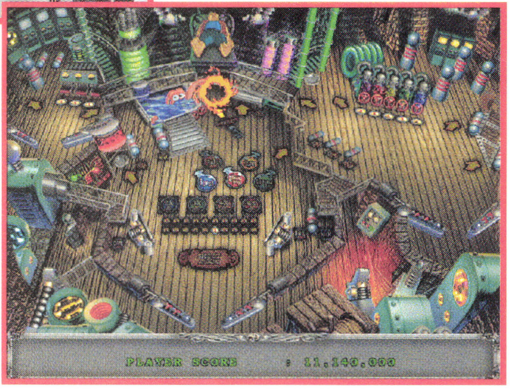
3D Ultra Pinball: Creep Night

Sierra

Windows

★★★☆☆

The follow-up to Sierra's *3D Ultra Pinball*, *Creep Night*, as its title might imply, features a spooky theme, sporting three tables which portray areas of a haunted castle, each with its own theme: the castle courtyard, the mad scientist's tower, and everybody's favorite playground, the dungeon. Table layouts are roughly similar: a large central play area with two smaller "wings" (the wings in the courtyard are hard to get into), three pairs of flippers and an occasional lone flipper. Plenty of bumpers, ramps, lights and widgets fill up each table as well. Something which might throw the purists are the challenges and the animations (of things like creature running about the table) they engender. While these challenges add to the computer game, they're not something that would even be possible in "real" pinball and so might turn off some folks.



3D Ultra Pinball: Creep Night

I did notice a few glitches that might irk even the whimsical player. On a P60 with a double-speed CD and a minimal install (but 16 meg of RAM), the game would occasionally pause to access something on the CD… often at the worst possible moment (like hitting a flipper key). I lost many a ball to this, and it certainly lowered my enjoyment… at least until I tried a full install on a P-133, where the glitch went away. I also noticed a few graphics glitches: balls passing through solid objects (most noticeably, the backs of flippers). These were rare, however, and never had a significant effect on gameplay.

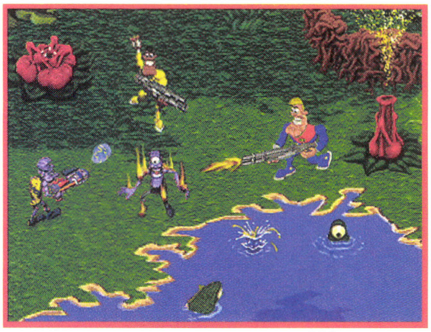
With all that said, I found *Creep Night* a fair amount of fun; for me, it would be something to boot up between hours-long sessions of *C&C* or *Battleground: Shiloh* (and it would be *great* to have running during a Halloween party, preferably with the speakers cranked). Players looking for a fantasy pinball challenge should definitely find it here, but the pinball purist may want to pass. –*Scott Udell*

Captain Quazar

Studio 3DO

Windows 95

★★★½☆



Captain Quazar

Straight outta 3DO-land comes *Captain Quazar*, sort of *Crusader: No Remorse* crossed with a Warner Brothers cartoon. The good captain, our hero and star, is a dork… a square-jawed dork (literally – he looks a bit like The Tick, minus the blue suit and the weird tick-things on his head). He's a shoot first, mumble something incoherent later kind of guy. He runs around an isometric alien landscape armed with guns, missiles and grenades as he tries to conquer a base on the orders of his boss.

The gameplay is typical of the genre. Shoot things, look for power-ups, find warp zone codes to take you to new levels, shoot more things, etc. What makes this stuff work is that it's really well done, with excellent graphics (especially the cut scenes) and sound. Don't bother trying to play it at 640x480 resolution, though – it's slower than snot. Full-screen mode is the way to go, and try it in 16-bit color for richer cut scenes (definitely worth it).

The game demands an excellent gamepad (try the Microsoft Sidewinder GamePad) and, like any isometric game, it can be difficult to align your gun with your target. In summary, *Captain Quazar* is a perfect conversion of a good console game, with nothing gained but, more importantly, nothing lost. –*Steve Bauman*

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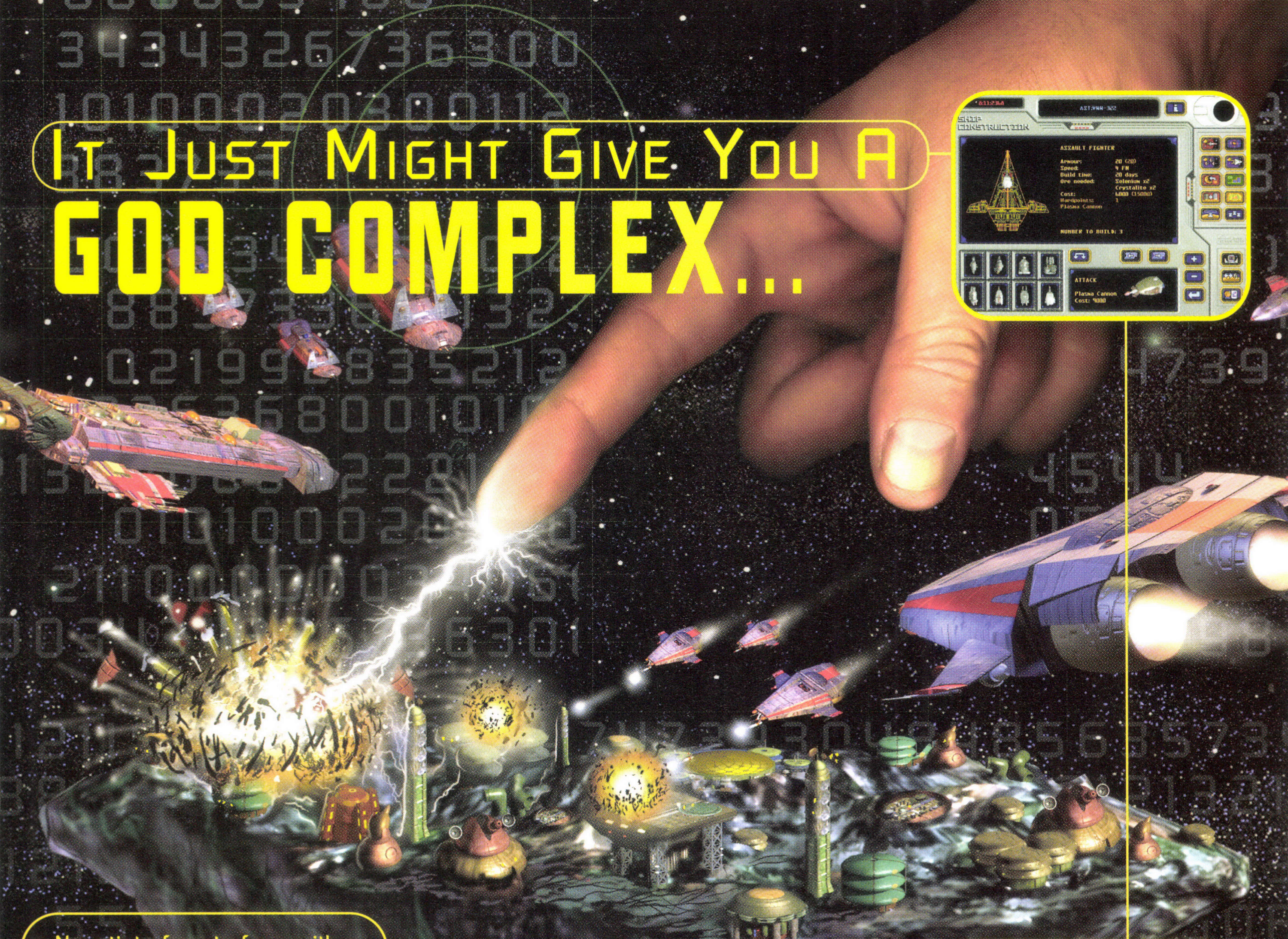

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Star Fighter

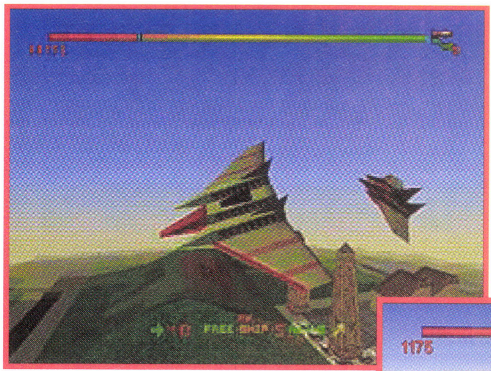
Studio 3DO

DOS, Macintosh

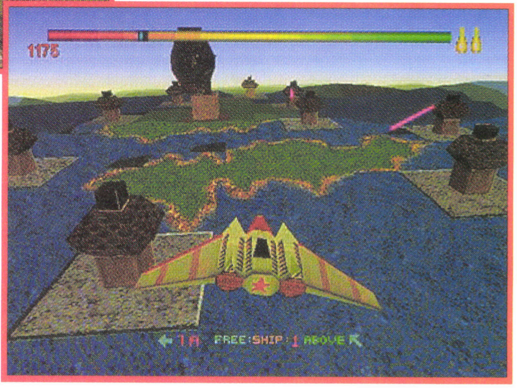
★★⯪☆☆

Star Fighter was a hit on the 3DO console, but on a computer it clocks in as only OK. This is a full-360 air combat shooter with a few hooks. Control of your ship has a slight flight-sim feel to it, and power-ups come in the form of different colored crystals. As you pick up crystals, various combinations combine to form better weapons, controls, more ammo, etc. You don't know which combinations produce which power-ups; the feeling is reminiscent of mixing reagents in an RPG to see what sort of spell you can produce.

Beyond that, there's not much here you haven't seen before. This is a "live" environment, in that everything can be destroyed (to the point of blasting holes in the terrain, *Magic Carpet*-style) and the in-game graphics are decent, but the horizon is far too close. The production values are generally spotty. For instance, after saving the game subsequently "forgot" a joystick was selected as the input device, which meant an annoying quit and restart. The non-flying controls are just plain non-intuitive: as an example, the tactical map uses <Enter> to zoom in, but the left <Alt> key to zoom out. FMV video cut-scenes look like straight ports from the 3DO version (which means they're horribly pixelated).



Star Fighter



Once you get past the crap and into the game, it's actually pretty fun. You blast buildings and enemies, then swoop down to gather the resulting crystals. There are weapons to acquire, wingmen, orbiting motherships to dock with, and resupply crates to float down on parachutes. The question is, do you want to shell out hard-earned cash just so you can struggle to get to the good stuff? If not, wait for *Star Fighter* to hit the bargain bin, or get a buddy and split the cost (both MacOS and DOS versions come in the same package, but on separate CDs). *–Peter Smith*

Manic Karts

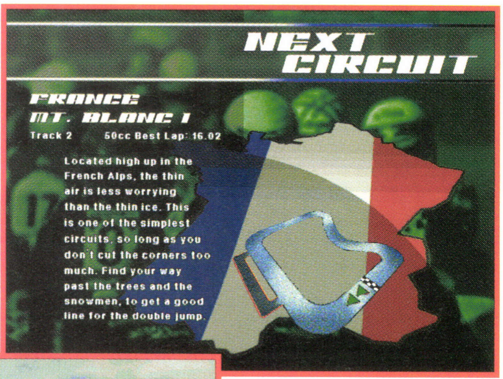
Virgin

DOS

★★⯪☆☆

Ho-hum. Another day, another sequel. Here's the routine. Take a game, any game, say… last year's incredibly fun *SuperKarts*. You throw on some high-resolution paint, add a few new tracks, buff up the interface to a fine sheen, and voila, insta-new game.

The only problem is that *Manic Karts*, the game in question, adheres to this design philosophy too rigidly. Sure, the visuals are better, but only slightly. The game utilizes a third-person behind-the-car view of your go-kart as you motor around the tracks, and it works quite well (except for those times when you lose track of your own car in traffic). The high-resolution graphics look only slightly sharper, and the speed hit isn't worth it.



NEXT CIRCUIT

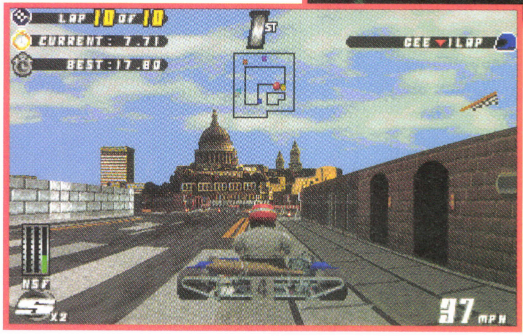
FRANCE

MT. BLANC 1

Track 2 50cc Best Lap: 16.02

Located high up in the French Alps, the thin air is less worrying than the thin ice. This is one of the simplest circuits, so long as you don't cut the corners too much. Find your way past the trees and the snowmen, to get a good line for the double jump.

Manic Karts



The track designs are more interesting, but only slightly. There's 16 different tracks and they're more complex in design, but incredibly tiny in actual size. There's no elevation changes, and the physics are simplified to the point that grass and snow are indistinguishable (you slide around on either). More runoff areas and a less claustrophobic environment would have been preferable.

The game has the same power-ups as the previous ones, the same pit-stop (enter the pits, slow down, get extra power-ups, and fill 'er up), the same drivers, the same lack of different cars, the same "win money, buy bigger engine" paradigm and the exact same car physics model. The latter isn't troubling, because basically this is still an eminently toss-able racing game; the overrated *Screamer* should have felt this good. It's also networkable (for up to four players via IPX), and plays exceptionally well with the keyboard. The low-resolution mode also works on a fairly large variety of machines.

If you haven't played *SuperKarts* and really love a good arcade racing game, then by all means give *Manic Karts* a try. It has a slick car model and is a hoot to drive. However, for the five of us who played and loved the first game, *Manic Karts* is so devoid of new features there's little reason to own this as well. – *Steve Bauman*

Bedlam

Mirage

Windows 95

★★★☆☆

When *Syndicate* came out, how could we have known we were looking at the birth of a genre: the ultra-violent isometric perspective strategic action game? Unfortunately, with few exceptions (Origin's *Crusader* series, and now the direct progeny, *Syndicate Wars*), no game has come close to the quality of the original.

Bedlam takes a nice stab at it. At first glance, you might be reminded of *Total Mayhem*. The artwork is similar, and the maps are as contorted and bizarre as they were in that flawed game. However, developer Mirage has put more work into movement paths here, so your robot won't get hung up trying to maneuver around a light pole.

Each mission has one primary and several secondary objectives. You spend cash to arm your 'bots (up to seven weapons can be carried at once) and are then dropped into the mayhem…er, the bedlam. Left click to move, right click to fire. Unless you're new to the genre, the controls will be intuitive. During the mission you can pick-up power-ups containing ammo, cash or

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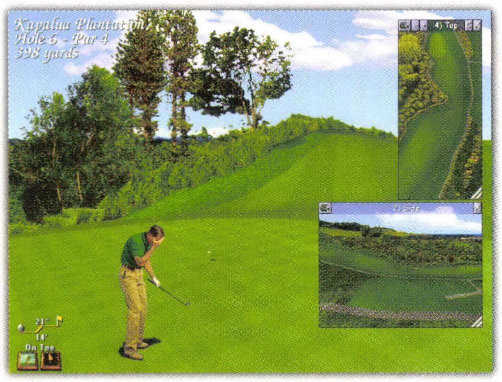

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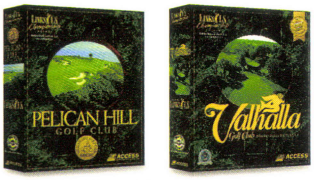

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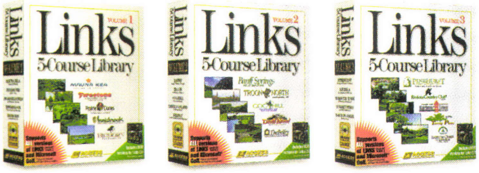
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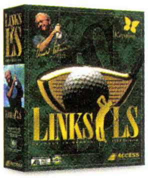

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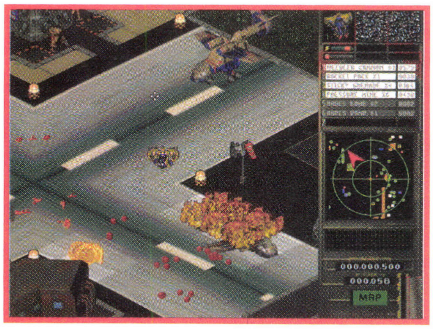

Bedlam

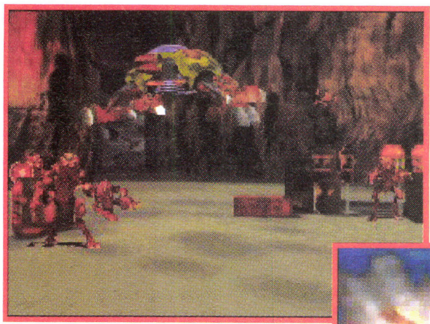
So what's wrong with *Bedlam*? Mostly little things: buttons get stuck, save games get lost, the game crashes when you exit and levels tend to be too big and meandering (you can't save in mid-mission). You know the feeling of quality a really well designed, programmed and tested game gives? Well, you won't find that here. It lacks polish, but with that said, the game delivers a decent amount of fun. It's definitely a solid "B" title. – *Peter Smith*

Area 51

Williams

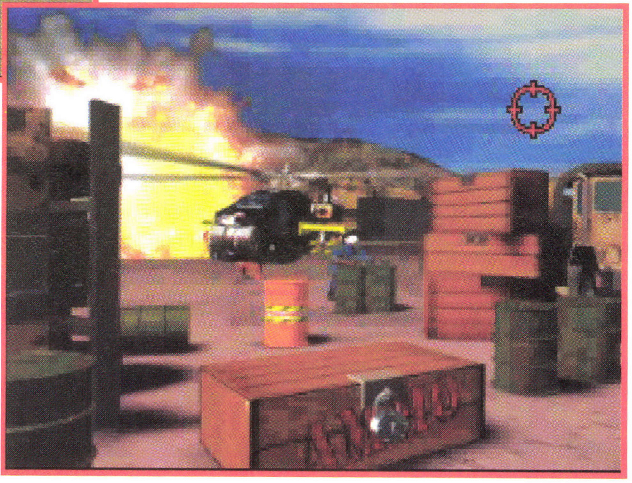
Windows 95

★★☆☆☆


Area 51

This is a perfect example why you don't convert some arcade games to the PC. Atari's *Area 51* is a superb arcade game; a rail shooter where you shoot a bunch of aliens as you make your way through the legendary base that *X-Files* fans already know about. Unfortunately for the PC conversion, what makes it so entertaining isn't the gameplay.

It's the gun, stupid.



Area 51, like *Virtua Cop*, uses a light gun in the arcade, and you reload by firing off screen. With two players firing away, the game is thoroughly exciting, despite it's repetitive and boring gameplay. The PC version substitutes a mouse for the gun (and for two players, one gets to use the keyboard – yippee), and the end result is you get the repetitive and boring gameplay minus the visceral thrill from the gun interface.

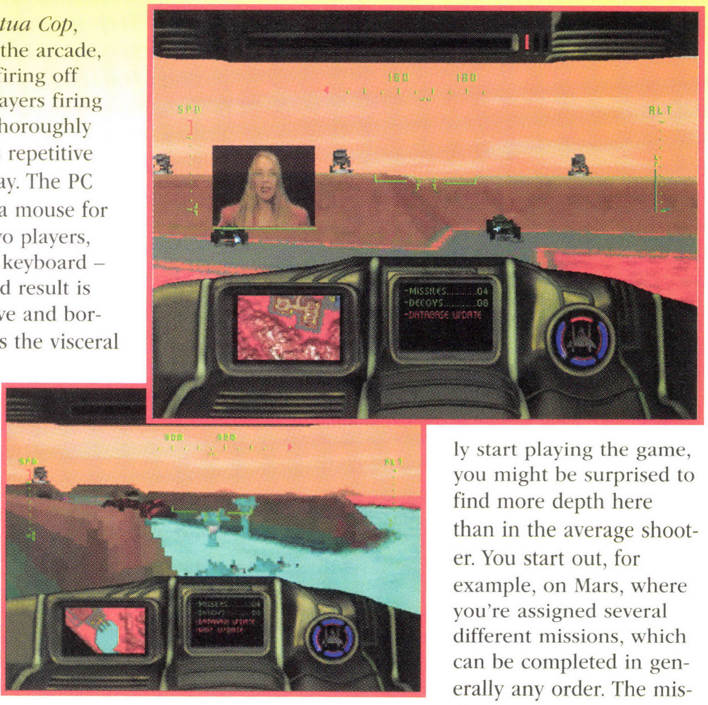
Having said that, if you can't get enough of the arcade game and want to master it, by all means check out this version because, if anything, it'll allow you memorize the exact locations of every bad guy without having to spend a penny (well, aside from the $40 you plunk down on the thing). It runs perfectly, looks good, and is fun the first couple of times through. But just remember: it's the gun, stupid. – *Steve Bauman*

Surface Tension

Gametek

DOS, Windows 95

★★⯪☆☆


Surface Tension

The story behind *Surface Tension* is pretty forgettable: lone hero, evil corporation, hidden mine of precious drugs, etc. The goal in the game is to fly your craft through a number of missions on different planets, asteroids, and mines, eventually finding your way to the corporation's secret mine, so you can unveil corporate treachery and prevent the suffering of untold millions.

So far, so dull, right? But once you actually start playing the game, you might be surprised to find more depth here than in the average shooter. You start out, for example, on Mars, where you're assigned several different missions, which can be completed in generally any order. The missions are even interesting and varied: destroy something here, meet with an informant there, etc. I appreciated the fact that, on the easy level at least, there didn't seem to be a clock ticking; just what this less-than-dexterous, methodical action gamer needs. Even things like "power ups" are believable; instead of finding extra missiles scattered about the landscape, for example, you find them at an ammo dump waiting for shipment. Mission quality degraded, however, the further I got; by the time I got to the moon Io, things weren't at all clear; perhaps this is because I missed something earlier on, but if so, the game didn't tell me.

The actual combat action is fairly simplistic, with lasers and missiles your primary tools; keyboard control is awful, but the game works amazingly well with a Microsoft Sidewinder. In many ways the gameplay reminds me of a cross between the old *Rescue on Fractalus* and *Comanche: Maximum Overkill*. The graphics, unfortunately, also seem to be a cross between these two games. While supposedly operating in hi-res, true-color modes, the visuals are muddy at best, and sometimes downright poor. Video and animation picture quality is likewise substandard, and the acting in the video sequences is very weak.

You might pick up the box and think, "Ehh, just another quasi-sim action game, I'll pass." That was my first impression of *Surface Tension* as well, but as I got further into the game I was surprised to find some fairly decent gameplay; not outstanding, but not horrible either. Were it not for the sub-standard graphics the game might even be called good, but as is it gets only a "middlin'-fair." –*Scott Udell*

HIND

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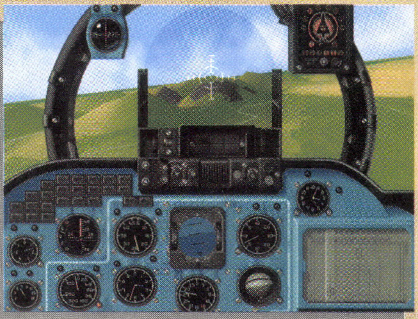

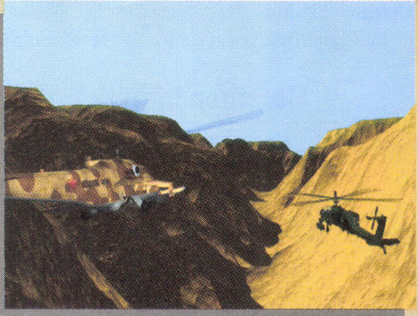

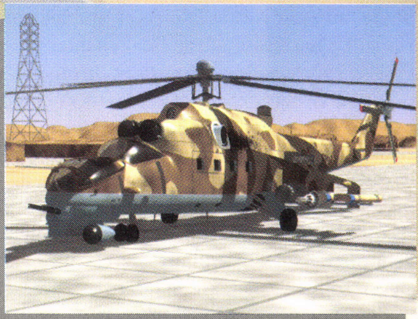

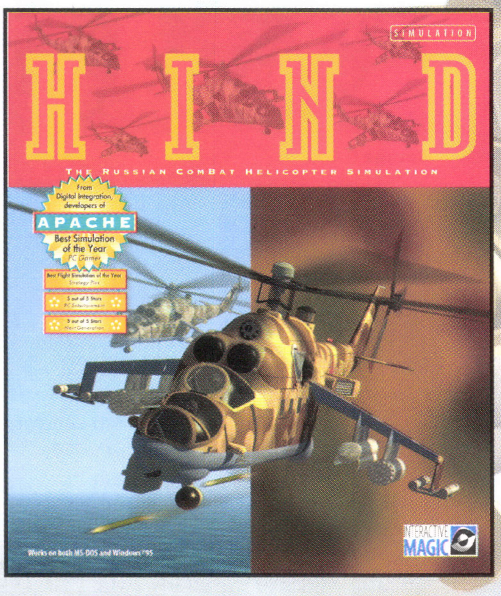
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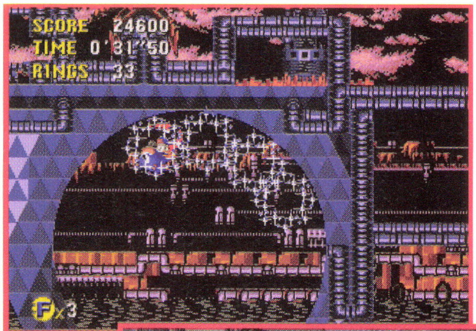
Sonic CD

Sega

Windows 95

★★☆☆☆

It's the Genesis classic. It's one of the best platform games ever created. On your PC. Running under Windows 95. Runs in a window. Runs full screen. Runs in low-resolution mode. Utilizes the same graphics as the Genesis. Big pauses while the CD player switches CD-audio tracks. Two install options: 1 megabyte or 150 megabytes. Needs a fast $2,500 Pentium to play like a $100 console system.



Sonic CD

Why not an all-new game? Why not take advantage of the superior aspects of the PC? Why the steep machine requirements? Why is the music so lame? Why can't I stop singing the terrifying theme song? Why is this still a entertaining game? Why did they bother with a PC version? Why should you just stick with the Genesis version?

Read the first paragraph. – *Steve Bauman*

Marathon Infinity

Bungie

Macintosh

★★★★☆

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

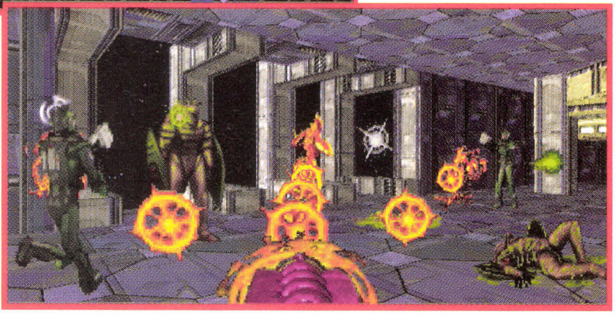
Well, Mac gamers finally have something to cheer about again. After sitting through the releases of *Duke Nukem 3D* and then *Quake* on the Intel side of the divide, they can finally dig out their rocket launchers and let 'em rip with the release of the final chapter to the *Marathon* trilogy: *Marathon Infinity*.

Based on the same first-person 3D engine used in *Marathon 2: Durandal*, *Infinity* retains much of the look and feel of its predecessors. While the graphics are getting a bit long in the tooth, gameplay remains an enjoyable mixture of raw carnage and intelligent puzzle-solving. Infinity's levels are clever, sophisticated, and harder than ever.

But as any diehard will tell you, gameplay is only part of the reason why *Marathon* has maintained its popularity. The rich storyline begun in *Marathon* and *Durandal* has now taken a wild turn in *Infinity*, and will certainly keep players debating the details long after the final level has been completed.

Perhaps the best part of *Marathon Infinity* is not the game but the included editors. Forge, the map editor Bungie used to create *Marathon*, is one of the most powerful editors currently available. Its relatively simple interface holds tremendous potential to create and customize worlds for single-player or network play. Anvil is the accompanying shapes editor, which can customize objects and map textures. I have to say that ever since Forge hit my hard drive, it's been awfully hard to choose between booting up *Infinity* for another round of play, or breaking open my map to tweak those polygons just a little bit more…

Marathon Infinity preserves Bungie's hold on the small pinnacle of truly great Macintosh-only games. The combination of immersive gameplay and a killer level editor makes this a great value for Mac players. –*Elaine Benfatto*



Marathon Infinity

Abuse

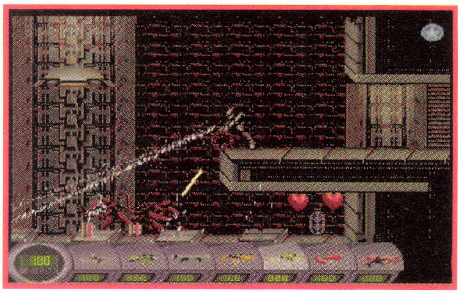
Bungie

Macintosh

★★★★☆

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

Created by Crack dot Com, a development company started by a few ex-id software-ites, *Abuse* started as shareware, Origin later published it for the PC, and now Bungie is handling the Mac version. It's the same great game every time; platform gaming at its best. Some levels have carnage, some have puzzles (and carnage). The controls are pretty much perfect; you use the keyboard to run your character around, and the mouse to aim and fire. A level editor is included, and it is as non-intuitive in this version as it was in all others. Bungie has made some minor improvements to the graphics (PowerMac only) but everything else is pretty much the same, which is to say: excellent. – *Peter Smith*



Abuse

Ravage D.C.X.

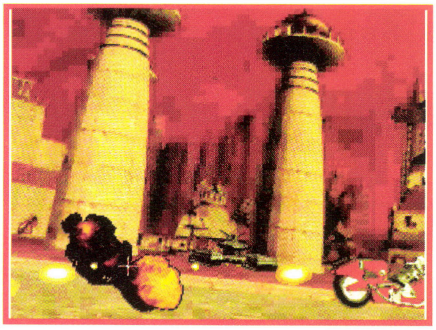
Inscape

Windows 95

★☆☆☆☆

Further proof for the theory that most people who make rail shooters don't actually play video games is Inscape's latest little gem, *Ravage D.C.X.* Done by Rainbow Studios, who had a large hand in Microsoft's *Deadly Tide*, this game (use the word "game" very, very loosely) makes *Deadly Tide* look like a masterpiece. First off, there is a point in trying to make new games look as good as the cinematic sequences that move their stories along. But the idea is for the game to look, not *play*, like a non-interactive sequence.

Deadly Tide's saving grace is that the story, which moves along its path briskly with great visuals and sounds, has decent play control to back it up. *Ravage* has the same sort of cinematic visuals, pacing and storyline, but lacks the level of control present in *Deadly Tide*. The control in *Ravage* is by contrast quite sloppy and annoying. The game allows mouse control only grudgingly, and doesn't offer any control customization options for it. To add insult to injury (of the player), the game seems to have a problem getting gamepads to work right (the README file mentions a problem with them, and offers a possible solution, which was tried with no result).



Ravage D.C.X.

If you must have a rail shooter, get *Deadly Tide* (even with its obnoxious ending), or even *Rebel Assault II*. Not counting Atlantean Interactive titles or the utterly awful *Pyst* (whichat least is cheap), *Ravage D.C.X.* is the worst thing to come down the pike in a long time. In short, it's recommended that you not buy this game. – *Jason D'Aprile*

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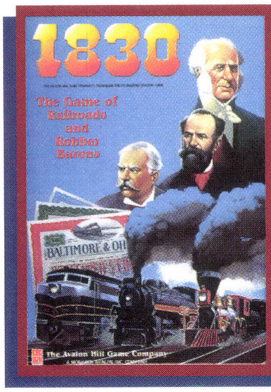
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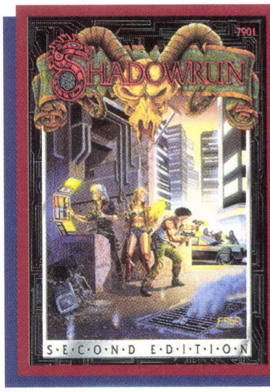

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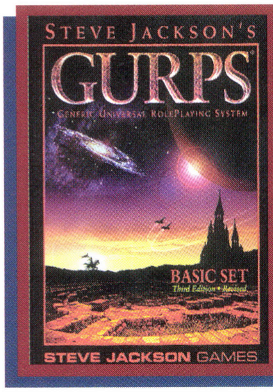

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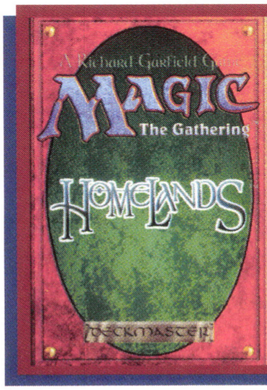

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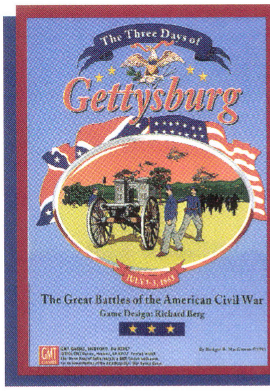
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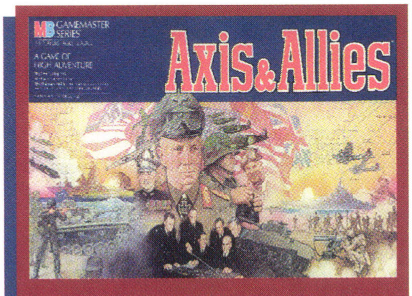

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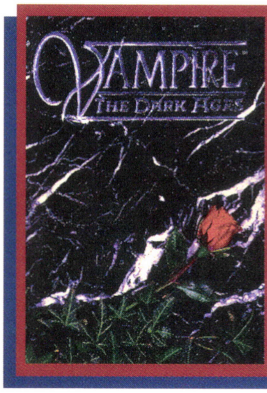

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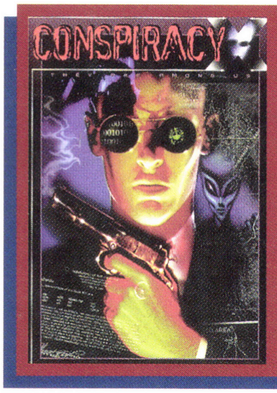

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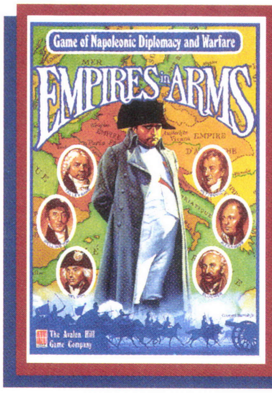
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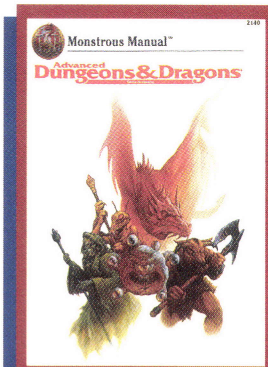

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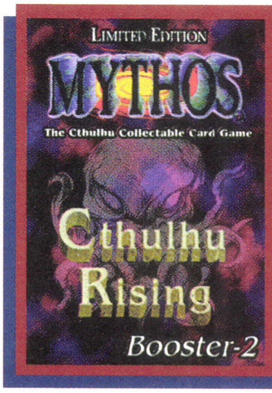

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by Cindy Yans

Road to Nowhere

Caveat emptor or get PYST: Palladium Interactive's marketing madness

Wandering down the software aisle staring blankly at row after row of software titles, what's an adventurer to do? Especially during the holiday season, when shelves are just about *vomiting* inventory; it's so hard to decide. Here a sequel, there a sequel, here a cross-genre title, there a savvy marketing display... Oh, and by the way, speaking of savvy marketing, and speaking of vomiting, there's a little brown box slithering around the shelves this season containing a little brown product (reminiscent of some well known *human* by-product) known as *PYST*.

Everyone I've seen come into contact with this box (myself included) has produced more or less the same reverently uttered phrase, which can be translated loosely as, "Whooooa...cool." Even non-gamers who have of course heard of the legacy of *Myst* have reacted similarly. A moderately computer-illiterate type came into my lair, er office, the other day and from the mountain of games-in-progress boxes strewn about, he honed in on the little brown one and said, "*PYST*! Whooooa..." (you fill in the rest).

"Four Million People Have Trashed The Island...Now It's Your Turn!" boasts the box. Parroty Interactive, a new division of Palladium Interactive, offers us one of the worst pieces of software of 1996 in their shameless parody (?!) of *Myst*. But what a brilliant piece of marketing. Certainly there are enough innocuous consumers out there who will read the word *PYST*, be proud to have connected it with... (now what did they call that?) *Myst*, and happily scarf up the product, no questions asked; especially at the comparatively low retail price of about $18.00.

So what have they purchased? Not a game, that's for sure. But all right... it doesn't pretend to be a game. It is an "Interactive CD-ROM and Online Comedy." The interactive CD-ROM consists of about a dozen interactive postcards, with hot spots which produce hilarious (not) effects. See the dragon belch. See the mutant mouse irradiated. The flip side of each card contains a humorous (still not) message from a quirky (nope) character. In an audio clip, John Goodman (as King Mattruss, ruler of PYST island) sings, "I'm PYST..." I would be too, if my agent allowed me to do this project. We're also treated to a behind-the-scenes look at the making of PYST by Firesign Theatre's (remember it?) Peter Bergman. "Users will play *PYST* again and again..." touts the product release. I can't even imagine. "...Everyone will laugh and everyone will finish!" Well that's half true... it only *takes* fifteen or so minutes to finish.

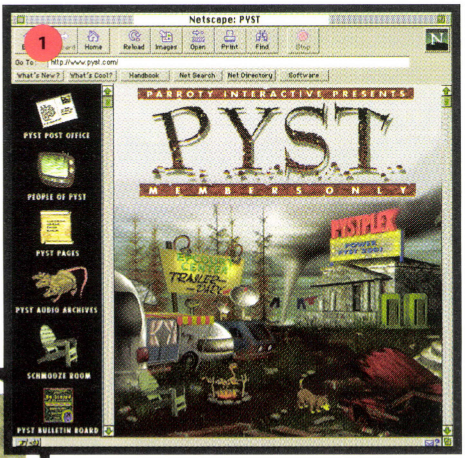
Let's see... about $15.00 (if you were fortunate) for fifteen minutes... you do the math. It costs about the same per minute as a call to the PYST Hotline – advertised along with a bunch of other money-making goodies which you can purchase through the PYST website. Which brings me to the other side of the mountain – the online comedy slope.

The lucky owners of *PYST* will have a chance to enter the Members Only section of www.pyst.com. Here we have drivel masquerading as kitsch (and who can tell which is worse?), with four bulletin boards and several sections of commentary from the characters of PYST island, such as Prince Formerly and Prince Syrrup; we have The People of PYST – some of the postcard characters – offering a paragraph or so of side-splitting "profile" coverage:

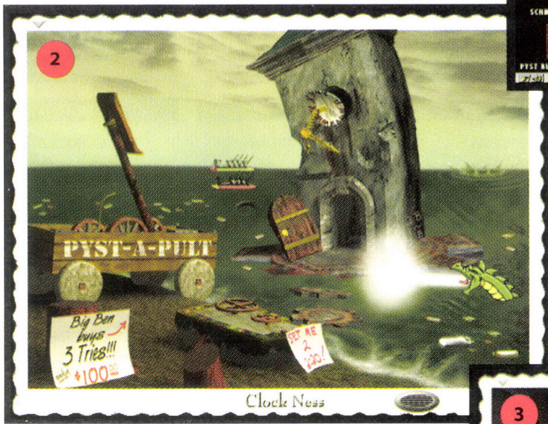
"Maxx Midas is the king of the lifestyle salesmen...Maxx made his first million marketing the Butt-Whistle. The device, which turns nature's call into the sound of a beeping pager, has saved thousands of gas-impaired individuals from certain embarrassment..."

Also available is a chat-room connection (available only with many additional downloadable applications).

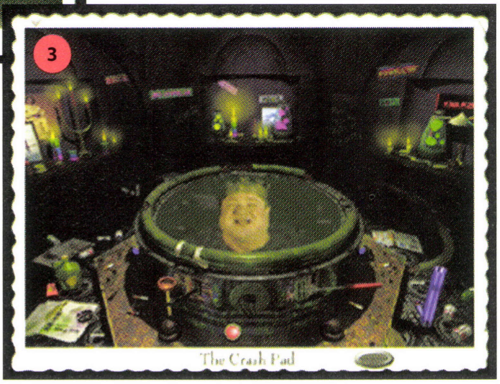
The less privileged visitors to the site who cannot enter the Members Only area are able to visit the mall for hats, tee shirts, et al. and are confronted with a persistent marquee advertising the 900 number and the Psychotic Friends Network. I confess that I did call this number...and guess what – a menu with four or five Friends' recordings. Well, you knew that. I heard Princess Grail answer the question, "What is cool music?" and Dr. Shrinkwrap tell me "How to change the real you." Says Shrinkwrap, "You bald? Get a rug."



[1] For the truly elite members of society who actually own Pyst, a web area has been set aside in their honor



[2] Click on the Clock Ness monster and guess what? He belches! Bwhahahahahaaaa!!!



[3] In some of the worst FMV ever to hit the small screen, we have several instances of none other than John Goodman – often in the water. Shudder

The best endorsement of the game (a "Pystamonial) came from a fellow known as Fast Eddie B., who states, "And don't you for a second think that I'm excited about *PYST* because it just so happens that my company's publishing it. That's just my good luck."

So if you are tempted by that little brown box, read the label that says, "The **Best Selling** CD-ROM Game of All time...is not inside this box," note the fine print...and believe it. And marketing execs, take a lesson. ■

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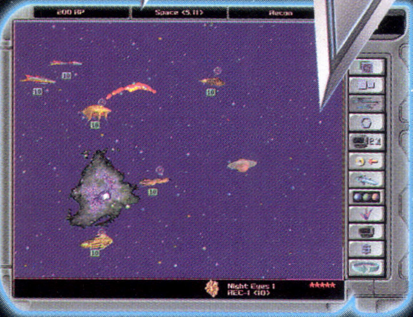

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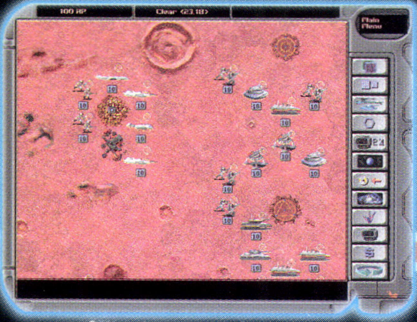

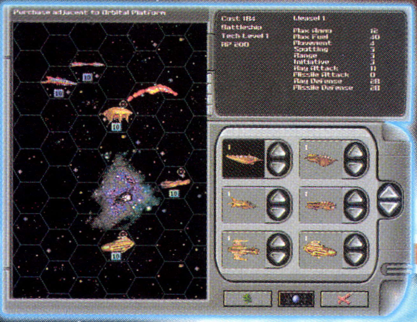

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by Andy Backer

Boots of Re

Excavating and examining Exile

Still more about Toaster, the dragon who thought he was Bogart.

To Dragon and Dragon Not

I first met Beata while flying over Krakow. I had just raided a sheep farm and had a live ram clutched in my claw.

"Was you ever bit by a dead bee?" the ram asked.

" Yes, but I bit him back," I chuckled.

Then I saw her. Gliding towards me in the wind. A gangly, skinny thing to some, maybe, but an exotic Polish dragon to me.

"Hi, Slim," I said.

"Didn't your Mama ever tell you it isn't polite to talk to your food?"

"Was *you* ever bit by a dead bee?" the ram asked her.

"Yes, but I bit him back," she replied.

"That's just what *he* said!" And the ram laughed, ba-ba fashion, as Beata ate him, winked, and flew off.

She called out from a distance, "If you want me, all you have to do is to come flying. You know how to fly, don't you? Just put your wings together and flap!"

Hot & Not

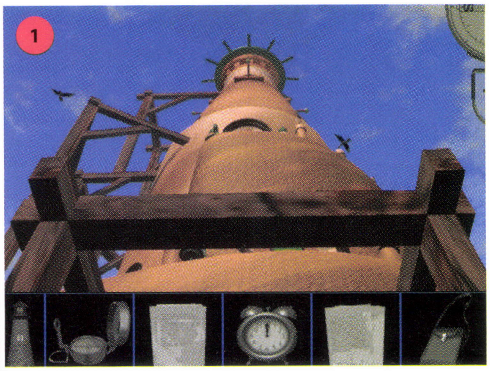
Daggerfall (Elder Scrolls II) was super hot during October, but somewhat controversial. Although most gamers were highly pleased with the role-playing-game's superior depth, some were highly offended by Bethesda's buggy initial release. Bethesda has since released corrective patches.

Sierra's *Lighthouse* was October's most popular (and *Myst*-like) adventure game.

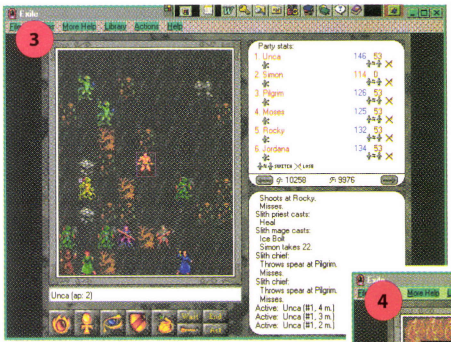
Exile: Escape from the Pit

Exile is an excellent role-playing game, similar graphically to the early Ultimas (which may be a turn off for some). Call 608-222-8468 to order.

After you've spent some time around Silvar building up levels and buying armor and skills, go northeast to Fort Duvno (by a lake). There is a shop there that will identify your finds and another that will buy everything you identify. Near Duvno to the northwest is a Bandit Fort. Northwest of that is a Nepharim Fort (pommel of Demonslayer). To the far north is a cave called New Fort (bronze key) and to the northeast is Bat Cave. These are good places to explore and loot in the beginning. In the northeast, near Bat Cave is a northern passageway to the city of Formello. There, the mayor gives a quest to retrieve a stolen gold necklace from the top floor of a three level Nephilim Fort (in a cul-de-sac off a northern passage) north of the Nepharim Fort.



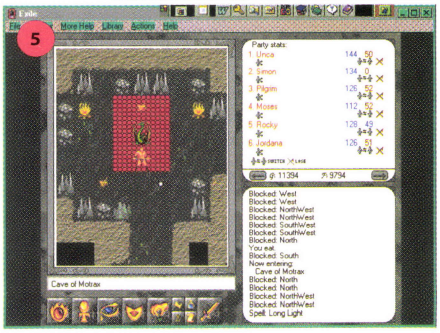
[1] Sierra's Lighthouse was October's most popular (and Myst-like) adventure game
[2] Daggerfall (Elder Scrolls II) was super hot during October, but somewhat controversial



```
Party stats:
1. Unca        146  53
2. Simon       114   0
3. Pilgrim     126  53
4. Moses       125  53
5. Rocky       132  53
6. Jordana     134  53
g: 10258    f: 9976
```

```
Unca (ap: 2)
```

```
Shoots at Rocky.
  Misses.
Slith priest casts:
  Heal
Slith mage casts:
  Ice Bolt
  Simon takes 22.
Slith chief:
  Throws spear at Pilgrim.
  Misses.
Slith chief:
  Throws spear at Pilgrim.
  Misses.
Active:  Unca (#1, 4 m.)
Active:  Unca (#1, 3 m.)
Active:  Unca (#1, 2 m.)
```



```
Party stats:
1. Unca        144  50
2. Simon       134   0
3. Pilgrim     126  52
4. Moses       112  52
5. Rocky       128  49
6. Jordana     126  51
g: 11394    f: 9794
```

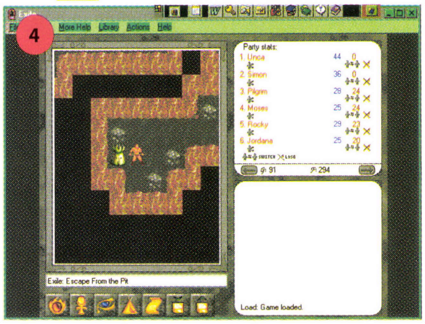
```
Cave of Motrax
```

```
Blocked: West
Blocked: West
Blocked: NorthWest
Blocked: NorthWest
Blocked: SouthWest
Blocked: SouthWest
Blocked: North
You eat.
Blocked: South
Now entering:
  Cave of Motrax
Blocked: North
Blocked: North
Blocked: NorthWest
Blocked: NorthWest
Spell: Long Light
```

The reward for the necklace is a Royal Token which will allow you to enter King Micah's Castle (go through a passageway as far south of Silvar as you can go, and then travel a *long* way west).

King Micah has some quests to save Exile. The first is to kill Sss-Thsss. You'll need an Onyx Key from the Slith Village (across the river north of Fort Dharmon). Take a boat south from Fort Dranlon and go down the river to the west, following the coast south to get to a huge lake. The castle is on an island in the middle. Enter from the west. Follow the wall to the south where there is a secret passage. Look for an Onyx Lock. On the second floor go southeast, west, north and east. Take the head of Sss-Thsss. West of the accursed pit, search for two hidden buttons. Push the one to the west to cross the bridge. Return to King Micah and ask about *mission*.

You'll need the sword Demonslayer for the next King's quest. The pommel is in a crypt in the very northwest corner of the Nepharim Fort. The blade is on the second floor of the Slith Temple (north of Almaria) at the north end of the swamp (you'll need a key hidden in the northeast corner of the first floor). The tip is at the bottom level of the Crypt of Death. Ask Motrex (the dragon east of Fort Draco) about *bribe* to find the key to the stone door (on the battlefield southeast). From Fort Emerald go north to the Slith Fort, then west to a huge cave. The Crypt is in the far northeast corner. Ask Boutell in Fort Draco to *repair* the sword.



```
Party stats:
1. Unca         44   0
2. Simon        36   0
3. Pilgrim      28  24
4. Moses        25  24
5. Rocky        29  23
6. Jordana      25  20
g: 91    f: 294
```

```
Exile: Escape From the Pit
```

```
Load: Game loaded.
```

Exile:
[3] The enemy spell casters hide in the back rows during combat [4] If you find this building looking for the King Micah's Castle you've gone too far west and south [5] Motrex the dragon has important information about the key to the stone door in the Crypt of Death

Do widzenia (Polish for goodbye)

Have to go, now. Toaster is anxious to eat the seventy-five turkeys the boys basted for him! In the meantime write to Unca at 71202,3451 on CompuServe or 71202.3451@compuserve.com. ■

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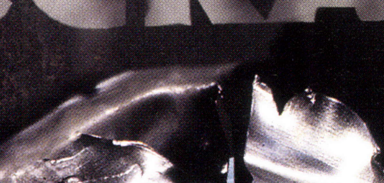
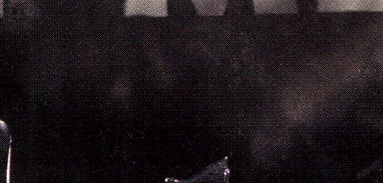
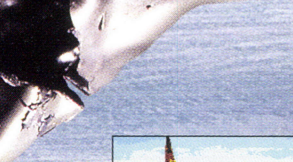


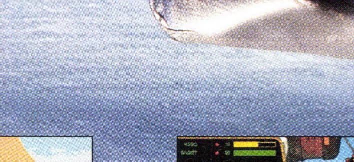
Eject from your HAWC, steal another. Bot-jacking is relatively legal here.



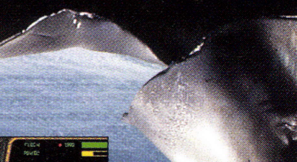
Wage war in everything from icy tundra to blistering desert. We suggest wearing layers.



Storm the enemy guard towers; try to avoid being turned into a red sinewy pile.



Destroy the enemy's HAWC delivery system and cut down on the number of missiles headed your way.



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Lock up the kiddies

Toonstruck

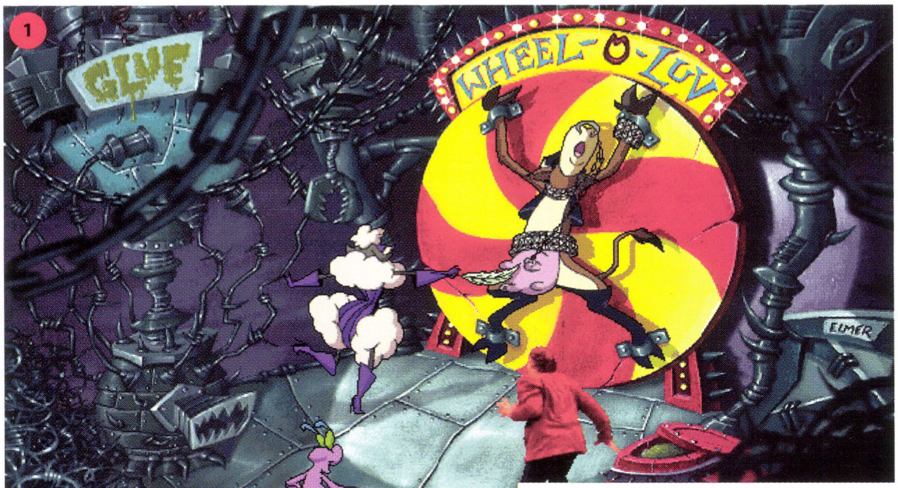
Virgin Interactive Entertainment

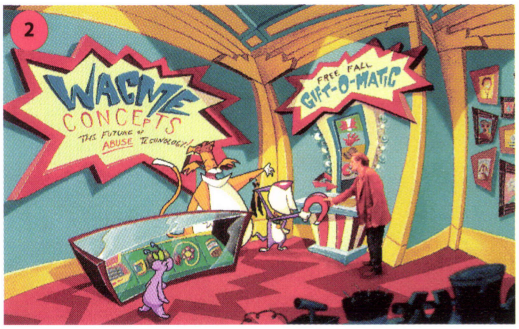
DOS

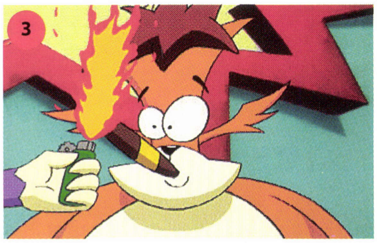
★★★⯪☆

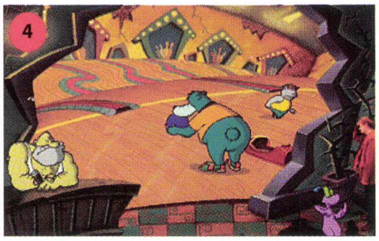
Nowadays, gamers looking for originality and innovation would be well-advised to steer clear of the adventure game. Outside of a few titles (*The Neverhood* springs to mind), it seems like new releases either rip off earlier adventures (mostly *Myst*) or parody the current movie of the moment. This gives many new games a feeling of "been there, seen that" from the first frame of animation, and doesn't bode well for the genre's future.

Typically, Virgin's live-action and comic world adventure *Toonstruck* borrows parts of its premise from the film *Cool World*, while channeling the gameplay of LucasArts' *Sam & Max Hit the Road*. Many of the scenes where the cartoon characters interact with the live-action protagonist will also immediately bring to mind Bob Hoskin's trip to Toontown in Robert Zemeckis' *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. All of these comparisons bring to light the game's main problem; it lacks an identity of its own. *Toonstruck* feels like a game designed by committee, and while you're playing "spot the reference," you will often lose sight of the whole point of the game, which is to take the player to a place where they haven't been and let them muck around a bit.









[1] Punisher Polly pleasures Mistress Marge on the "Wheel O' Luv." Note the udder piercings... ouch
[2] Drew wins that cartoon staple–the magnet
[3] Hey kids, don't try this at home
[4] Flux tries to convince Drew to give butt-bowling a try

You control Drew Blanc, the animator of the "Fluffy Fluffy Bun Bun Show," possibly the most annoying animated show in existence. After a meeting with Sam Schmaltz, the head of the studio, he's told the show needs some fresh energy, and that he'll be in full control of a new direction for it. Seeing an end to his creative block, Drew is decimated to find that Schmaltz has already made the decision for the new direction; more bunnies (using the theory of "if there's one bunny and it's popular, a show full of them will be even more popular"). Returning dejectedly to his office, Drew starts to draw more bunnies, eventually drifting off to sleep. During the night he's somehow transported into the cartoon realm, which is split into three disparate areas: the nauseating Cutopia, the wacky Xanydu and the dark Malevolands.

Upon arriving, Drew hooks up with his favorite creation, Flux Wildly. Flux rescues Drew from Count Nefarious' Malevolator, a device designed to warp the happy denizens of Cutopia into twisted shadows of their past selves. Drew and Flux go to Cutopia to visit the head (literally) of the realm, King Hugh and, in true adventure game fashion, Hugh will help Drew return to reality only if he helps rid the world of Nefarious. To do so, Drew and Flux have to go on that classic adventure game plot device; the scavenger hunt. This makes up the first half of the game. You need to collect 12 pieces to assemble the Cutifier, the antithesis to the Malevolator. The second half you spend at Nefarious' lair attempting to defeat the Count while, well, you'll just have to play the game to find out how it all ends. Unfortunately, the disappointing ending turns the entire game into a huge commercial for a *Toonstruck 2*.

In the course of your travels, you'll run into a virtual cornucopia of eccentric and wacky characters. You'll find dominatrix sheep, masochistic bovines and psychotic clowns. You'll flush fish, butt-bowl, play video games, work out, dodge snot and all the things you'd expect to do if you were stuck in a cartoon. The visuals are superb throughout; *Toonstruck* looks and feels like it cost a few million bucks to produce (it did). The visual look is pure Chuck Jones on acid, or more accurately, it looks like *Ren & Stimpy* gone cute. The longer non-interactive animation sequences are both technically and aesthetically superb, on par with film, rather than television, animation.

Christopher Lloyd's performance as Drew Blanc (a homage to Mel or a bad pun –you decide) is something of a mixed bag. Lloyd is something of a live-action cartoon himself, with his rubbery features and odd-sounding voice, so he integrates nicely into the cartoon universe (as he did in *Roger Rabbit*). However, his voice-over performance is inconsistent and occasionally uninspired, which may be a direct result of the clichéd and mundane dialogue. Object descriptions and supposed "witty" asides are usually not.

The sidekick character, Flux Wildly, the Max to Blanc's Sam, also lacks the sort of sharp dialog seen in *Sam & Max*. He makes all of the cynical and sarcastic cracks you'd expect of a sidekick, but most of them fall flat. Dan Castellanetta, the voice of Homer Simpson on TV's *The Simpsons*, provides the voice characterization, but those expecting typical Homer-isms (i.e. "Doh") will be disappointed; Flux comes across like a less manic version of Charles Fleischer's Roger Rabbit. David Ogden Stiers, Winchester from *M.A.S.H.*, does an excellent job with King Hugh, giving him the sort of soothing and over-friendly voice which makes you want to smack his smiling face, and the ubiquitous Tim Curry is equally good as Nefarious.

Imitation of popular pop-culture icons runs rampant though the game. You'll marvel at the Carvey doing Hanz imitating Schwartzenegger voice of the canine body-builder Jim, the Ross Perot-like canine Woof, the Jack Webb-like stoic nature of the out-house security guard, and the Baker brothers, who sound like Sewer Urchin from *The Tick* (that is, they sound like someone imitating Dustin Hoffman in *Rain Man*). It's not as if any of these performances are bad, though the game's numerous delays may have caused some of its problems with continuity. However, the excessive evocation of entertainment icons really hurts whatever originality the game might have had. Again, "been there, seen that."

In pure adventure game terms, this is the best LucasArts game since *Sam & Max*, equaling that game's level of difficulty and abstractness of puzzle (think toon and you'll be OK). The puzzles are a good mix of easy and moderately difficult (the book riddle is a good mind-bender, and getting the sunglasses is from the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* Babel Fish school of adventure design), and it's long enough that you won't finish it in one sitting. Of course this isn't a LucasArts game–it's by Virgin–but the dialog, interface, puzzle design and overall visual style and presentation are dead ringers.

This familiarity is good in the sense that it's easy to play and you feel quite comfortable, but *Toonstruck* never really takes off and transcends the genre. For all of its attempts at zaniness it ultimately isn't that funny. You'll get an occasional guffaw and a few bemused smirks, but few drop-dead laughs. The visuals try really hard to make things funny, wacky and manic, but the overlong and underwritten dialog constantly lets them down. The game never really achieves the anarchic glee it so obviously desires, something which both *Roger Rabbit* and *Sam & Max* managed to achieve effortlessly. Toonstruck only serves as a reminder of how brilliant those two productions really are. – *Steve Bauman*

Nemesis: The Wizardry Adventure

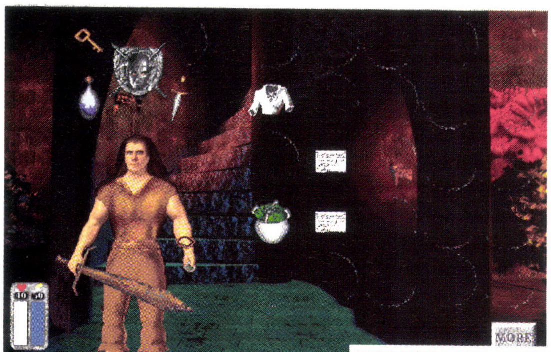
Sirtech

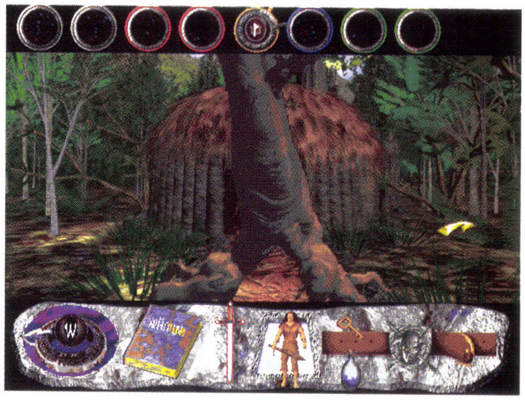
DOS

★★★½☆

Sirtech calls *Nemesis* an adventure, but it is mostly a fantasy-role-playing game. It may be only FRP-*lite* (lack of a character generator, light on combat) but it is still FRP; you start the game ranked as a peasant and explore a world filled with puzzles to solve and monsters you must pop with spell or weapon, enhancing your attributes, skills, spells, weapons, and armor along the way. Perhaps they wanted to avoid any comparisons with the much more detailed, turn-based FRPs they are better known for (*Crusaders of the Dark Savant*); or perhaps they wanted to justify the game's lack of balance between puzzles and combat (although *Nemesis* is much more like *Stonekeep* than *Lighthouse,* it still has too many adventure-type puzzles for my FRP comfort zone).

The game plays in first person real time with spectacular SVGA graphics and multiple rendered cut scenes. There's a much larger variety of settings both above and below ground than in *Stonekeep*, and they are seamlessly integrated with the cut scenes revealing your character's reactions to events. For example, while walking in the forest you step into quick sand. A cut scene shows you're sinking. You see branches of trees you can grasp. A cut scene indicates you've stopped sinking. You look around and find a path through the bushes, escaping the quicksand.





Nemesis: The Wizardry Adventure

You always have control of your character during these types of events, *as they occur*. You don't just watch. Therefore you experience the event directly, fully – and realistically. You are so immersed in the reality of the SVGA environment at times that you think you are really there. There's much more of a sense of reality to some of these puzzle events in *Nemesis* than in any other FRP I've ever played.

Unfortunately, all of these great effects take *mucho* computer power. Sir-Tech says the minimum requirement for playing the game is a 37 MB install, 2x CD ROM, 486/66 Mhz processor, and 8 MB of RAM. Maybe, but the game played intolerably slow on a Pentium 90 with 16 MB of RAM and a 3x CD ROM until I used the large install (153 MB). Even then, the game slowed down considerably at times while trying to access the CD. I was only *really* happy playing the game with a Pentium 133 Mhz processor, 16 MB of RAM and a 6X CD ROM.

There are also problems changing disks (the game comes on five). It was only possible to change them (in my case) playing the game through the swap in Windows 95, saving the game and then loading the save with the game in DOS. Most gamers will not experience the disk swap bug; it seems to be limited just to some CD-ROM drives. There should be a patch available correcting the problem by the time you read this (I would recommend playing the game entirely in Windows 95, but unfortunately, it plays *much* better in DOS).

Other negatives include mediocre sound and an awkward combat interface; it's too easy to cast an unwanted spell rather than using a sword. The documentation is scanty, leaving way too many things to discover by yourself (there is a *Tour Guide,* however, with partial walkthroughs for the first three levels plus some hints and tips for the remaining twelve). But where are the lists of weapons, armor and spells?

The bottom line is that although *Nemesis* can be an enjoyable game, it has some problems. It is visually a delight, which should appeal to those gamers who have been complaining about the VGA graphics of *Stonekeep* and *Daggerfall*. It is better than *Druid* (elements of the engine and interface will be familiar to *Druid* players), and perhaps graphically the most outstanding fantasy-role-playing-game ever to come down the pike.

But it has an awkward combat interface, too many puzzles. Besides that, compared to *Stonekeep* and *Daggerfall,* it's FRP-*lite*. It may taste good, but it just isn't very filling, at least by veteran CRPG-player standards. –*Andy Backer*

9

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

Tribeca Interactive

Windows 95

★★★★☆

There's something to be said about risk-taking in all aspects of entertainment and the arts. Without it, growth and development in any medium can never occur. In interactive entertainment, feeding into an established market with the increasingly paler sequel may certainly ensure shelf space and a cer-

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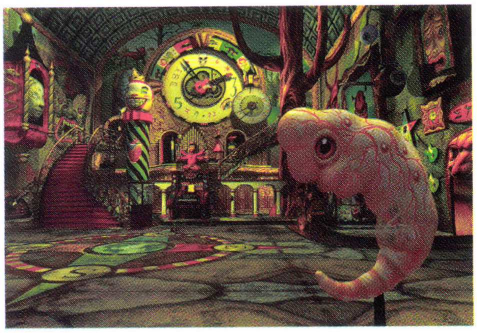
Mac OS Designed for Microsoft Windows 95 RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

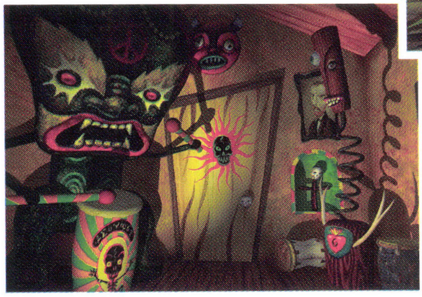
tain amount of guaranteed loyalty-sales, but it's so exciting to see someone teeter on the wire of all that has gone before and decide to do a double flip without spotters or a net.

With this in mind, let's take a look at the little gem, *9*. Not to say that *nothing* has transcended the norm in this fashion before. *A Bad Day on the Midway*, for instance, enjoyed a similar visual style. But nothing very recently (save Dreamworks' *The Neverhood* and perhaps *Toonstruck*) has been as tightly knit a piece of adventure game software. Of course, under the auspices of production heads Robert De Niro and partner Jane Rosenthal, Tribeca Interactive probably didn't worry all *that* much about risk.

Administrators of the estate of your late Uncle Last (Christopher Reeve) send you a letter summoning you to his once inspirational but now decaying resort house. The Last Resort had at one time revived the creative talents of artists from far and near with not only its magical opulence, but also its mysterious muse machine which was capable of tapping into a spring of unlimited creativity. Your quest is to repair the muse machine and to exorcise the Toxic Twins (Aerosmith's Steven Tyler and Joe Perry), a couple of evil spirits lingering within the resort.



9



The man behind the visual design is painter Mark Ryden, a popular artist in the music industry, who has given us a true touch of the surreal. The Last Resort looks like a funhouse which may have been designed by Salvador Dali (or Mark Ryden, for that matter). There are monkeys and demons and clowns and wriggling eyeball-covered insect larvae. You feel as though you are always being watched, and in fact you often are: A WWI-flying-ace-like creature named Sparky (Jim Belushi) whose lower half is an airplane, consistently appears behind you, and although he is a sympathetic character, his sudden presence can become disconcerting. Cher, as Isadora the Gypsy, plays a dual role. She is the online (*very* obscure) hint system, and is the personification of the main menu. Choose to save a game and you may hear something like, "I'm *always* saving for you...you don't call...you don't write..."

The puzzles are on the difficult side, and given the fact that much of the gameworld has been inspired by Aerosmith, rely heavily on the element of sound. A Jamaica-mon sculpture challenges you to repeat syncopated reggae riffs; a "concentration-style" activity involves sounds instead of pictures; a very sexy guitar with great legs needs a new G-string; and most inclusively, a pipe organ presided over by a four-armed crowned monkey invites you to play cryptic musical passages after each of which a token is proffered and the game advances.

Happily there are sufficient clues as to how to proceed, but in a world so boldly painted where absolutely everything is eye-candy, it's sometimes difficult to flesh out the important from the trivial. Absolute vigilance is required at all times. An extensive amount of artwork — paintings, tapestries, masks, laminated disc classics, sculptures, vintage autos and the like — adorn every surface, but only a few are crucial to game progression.

As if the Resort were not bizarre enough, there are a couple of parallel worlds within (attached to/symbiotically related to) it. One is an area where space and time are altered, and the player floats from one small plane to the next amid disembodied remnants of a life never lived (how obscure is *that?*). It is actually a three dimensional maze where you can *see* your destination, but cannot walk to it... the classic " you can't get there from here." Maddening. The other is the land of the Toxic Twins to which the player descends when all has been solved and the muse machine destroyed. Here lies the ultimate test.

A couple of technical difficulties (lockups during saves) and a bit of a slow go on a P100 with 32MB memory, along with a couple of weak arcade sequences (I wish we'd see the *end* of the wishy-washy arcade sequence in adventure games) are the only areas that dim the brilliance of this otherwise very satisfying gaming experience. Why do they call it *9*?

Why did they 9 thee? Let me count the muses. –Cindy Yans

Circle of Blood

Virgin Interactive Entertainment

Windows

★★★★☆

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

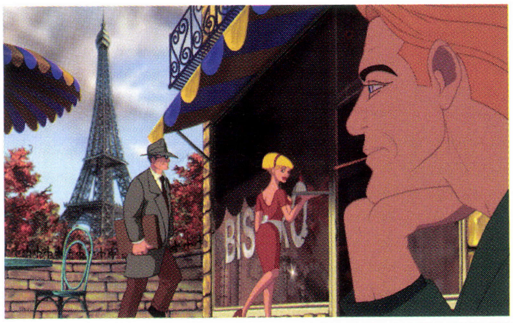
Autumn in Paris conjures up a pretty scene in the minds of many. The romance, intrigue, and ambiance of the city of love touches within us a light-hearted sigh. For without the discovery of the sacred fry by the French, what would we eat with our hamburgers? Leave it to Virgin Interactive to use that Parisian mystique as the foundation for *Circle of Blood*, its latest, and without a doubt its best, adventure game yet.

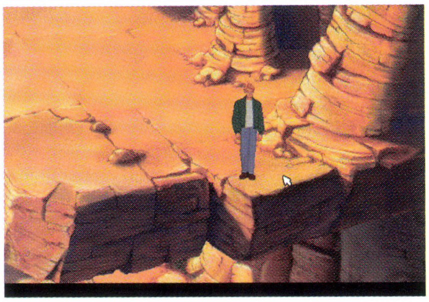
The game diaries the journey of George Stobbart as the protagonist visiting France while on vacation from the states. For poor George, a seemingly innocent cup of coffee turns brutal when the café it's surrounded by is demolished by an accordion-wielding clown (at least it wasn't one of those wind-walking mimes....)

Not satisfied with the inactivity of the French police, whose apparent mode of investigation stems from watching re-runs of the Psychic Friends Network, the hero steps out into the seedy side streets searching for his own answers.

From start to finish, *Circle of Blood* is a professional, polished work of art. All elements of game play are refined to the extreme, and as with any great novel (or after you've thumbed past the picture section of certain adult magazines), you'll feel a sense of loss when the story concludes.

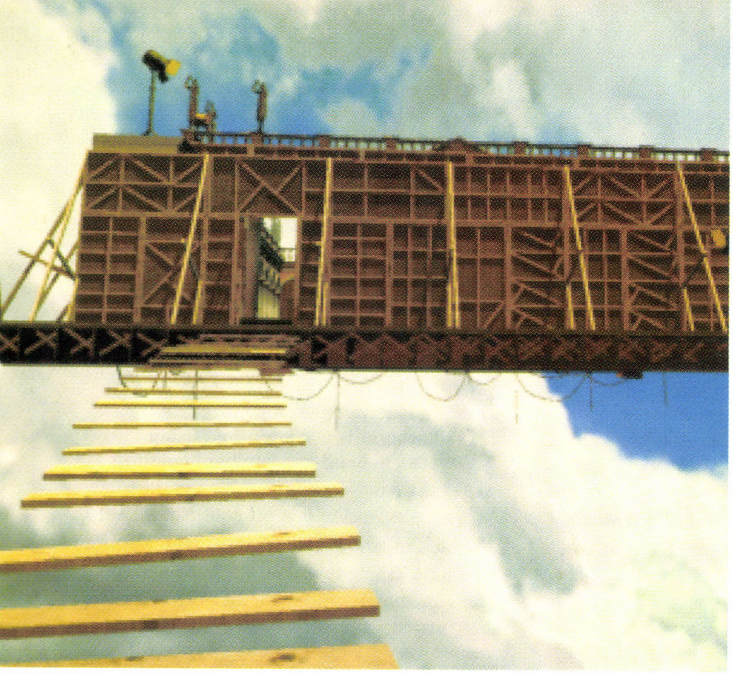
Given that the team of professional artists who designed each scene also worked on such "obscure" films as *An American Tail* and *All Dogs Go To Heaven*, it's no surprise that the background artwork lends a wistful air to the general theme of the game. It's not nearly as dark as the title implies.

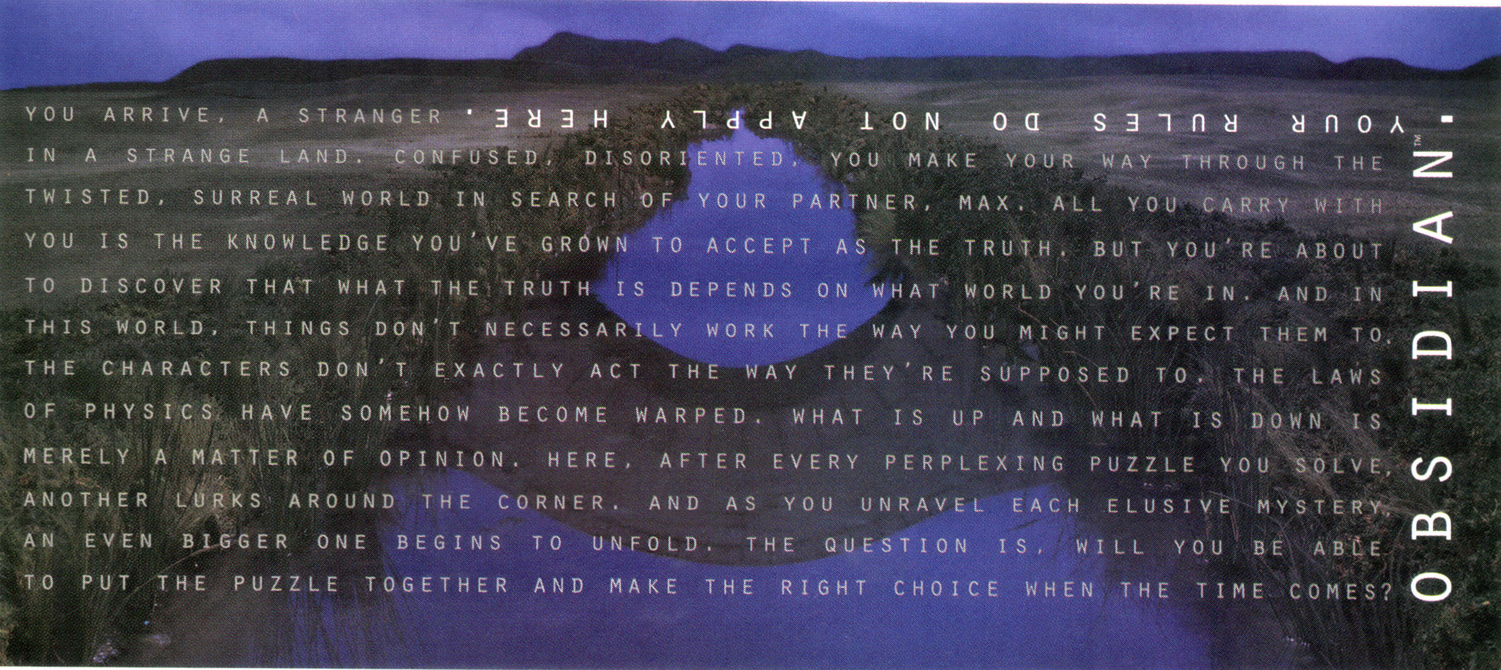




Circle of Blood

As with the artwork, the cel animation techniques used for the individual cast members are well above average. A broad spectrum of characters grace your path while the mystery plods on. Among them you'll find a fortune teller who sells flowers when the futuristic interests of the general public wane. Or an addled French cop who, after viewing a corpse at the scene of the crime, spits out a demand to the crumpled body to





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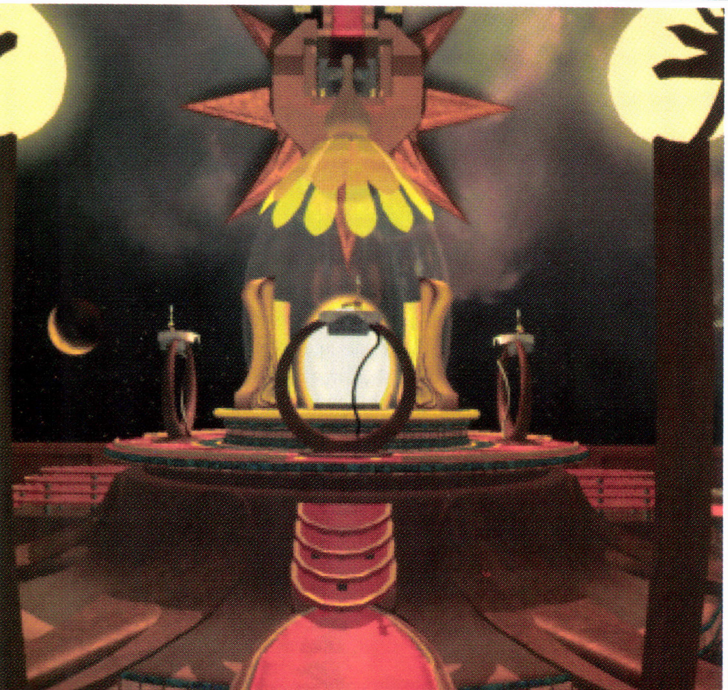
YOU ARRIVE, A STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND. CONFUSED, DISORIENTED, YOU MAKE YOUR WAY THROUGH THE TWISTED, SURREAL WORLD IN SEARCH OF YOUR PARTNER, MAX. ALL YOU CARRY WITH YOU IS THE KNOWLEDGE YOU'VE GROWN TO ACCEPT AS THE TRUTH. BUT YOU'RE ABOUT TO DISCOVER THAT WHAT THE TRUTH IS DEPENDS ON WHAT WORLD YOU'RE IN. AND IN THIS WORLD, THINGS DON'T NECESSARILY WORK THE WAY YOU MIGHT EXPECT THEM TO. THE CHARACTERS DON'T EXACTLY ACT THE WAY THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO. THE LAWS OF PHYSICS HAVE SOMEHOW BECOME WARPED. WHAT IS UP AND WHAT IS DOWN IS MERELY A MATTER OF OPINION. HERE, AFTER EVERY PERPLEXING PUZZLE YOU SOLVE, ANOTHER LURKS AROUND THE CORNER. AND AS YOU UNRAVEL EACH ELUSIVE MYSTERY, AN EVEN BIGGER ONE BEGINS TO UNFOLD. THE QUESTION IS, WILL YOU BE ABLE TO PUT THE PUZZLE TOGETHER AND MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE WHEN THE TIME COMES?



"cease and desist." Of course, we can't forget the ever-present love interest (this *is* Paris, after all), whose skills in journalism rival that of a crosswalk signal. Luckily, she has some very big... dreams about being famous that lead her to offer your character assistance throughout the game.

Adding to an already superb game is a musical score which puts those in most of the recent Disney flicks to shame. Each selection is rich, well orchestrated, and quite perfect for anyone who plays *Quake* just to go "help the poor monsters find their inner child." Music is as mood altering as any prescription medication, and composer Barrington Phelong taps masterfully into its abilities to lighten the heart while still leaving the sense something is amiss.

While showering accolades of praise onto *Circle of Blood*, it would be unfair not to mention its few shortcomings. Namely, there are no rabid chipmunks to be found. This will disappoint those who insist on a steady diet which feeds off the intelligence of small, rodent-like creatures. Sadly, this game falls well short....

Aside from that, the only gripe would be the rudimentary dilemmas presented throughout the game. Most of the trinkets and trivial trekking is done for the sake of the escalating plot. It's far easier to get lost amidst the game's grandiose plot than to submerge into its depth of superficial puzzles.

No other game has an installation program which lets you play a miniature round of *Breakout* while the files install to your hard drive. Subtle camera effects, such as parallax scrolling, where the foreground pans at a different rate than the background, give credence to the notion that talent might just be worth more than technology when it comes to a good story.

Mix the sickeningly sunny world of *Pollyanna* with the sinister overtones of *The Crow*, and you've got a pretty good idea what *Circle of Blood* is about. It's inspiring to see an adventure game that actually produces a tale worth paying $8 to see at a theater. Heck, you can even make the popcorn yourself, if you don't mind your fingers sliding off the keyboard as you play. *–Tim Royal*

Clandestiny

Trilobyte

Windows 95

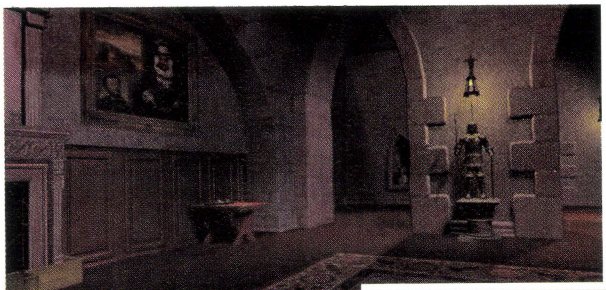
★★⯪☆☆

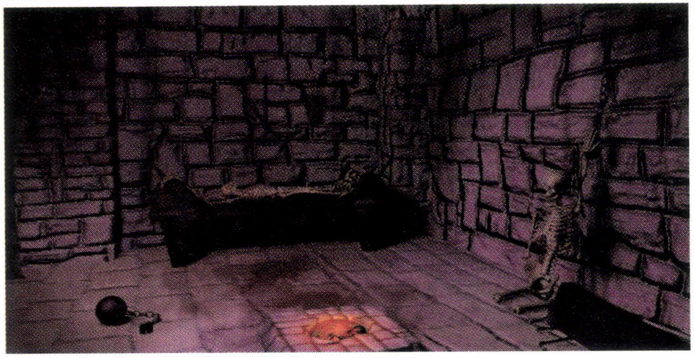
Have *The 7th Guest* and *The 11th Hour* moved to Scotland? Has the twisted toy maker decided to trade in his cheap suit for a kilt and swap his mansion for a castle? By the looks and play of *Clandestiny*, one would think so.

Like many game companies which struck gold on their first title, Trilobyte has fallen into the "too much of a good thing" category. There is no doubt that *The 7th Guest* was a revolutionary and innovative game; however, its success has proven difficult to duplicate. Even its immediate sequel *The 11th hour* seemed to be more of the same.

Set in the bonnie blue of Scotland, *Clandestiny* places you in the shoes of cowardly Andrew MacPhiles; 13th earl of the clan MacPhiles, and heir to the castle "and all that it shall bring." Shaken by the warnings of strange shepherds and ghastly ghosts along the way, Andrew – along with his feisty girl friend, Paula – makes his way to his castle. Upon arrival he meets some of the inhabitants, including the light-hearted rhyming handyman, Fergus, and the obviously not-so-light-hearted butler, Murthy.

Andrew learns that along with his inheritance comes a curse which has haunted his family for twelve generations; a curse which will end "when six and six make thirteen." Yet another classic Trilobyte puzzle. Throughout the game, Andrew meets his cowardly ancestors, who try and school him in the art of bravery so that he can fulfill his destiny like a true clansman. After meeting all twelve ancestors, Andrew is ready to face his destiny and win the sacred (and highly overrated) Stone of Scone.





Clandestiny

Although the surrounding story is original and well spun, game-play has evolved little since *The 7th Guest*. Complete with the throbbing brain icon from *The 11th Hour*, even the individual puzzles reek of Stauf's stuffy house. There are only so many chess and jump-the-peg puzzles a player can solve before they become B.O.R.I.N.G. As an added bonus, word puzzles abound, and must be solved prior to opening every door. Although entertaining at first, eventually they become tedious and repetitious, and worse, break up the flow of the game.

The graphics are up to Trilobyte's usual high standards, although the game requires a graphic card which supports Direct X 2.0 (most do; those based on the Trident chip set do not). The inside of the castle MacPhiles is very detailed and beautifully drawn, and the animated cut scenes are both smooth and of high quality. We can thank the heavens that the full-motion-video experienced in *The 11th Hour* has been replaced by more appropriate cartoon style cut-scenes. This, accompanied by a beautifully scored Scottish sound-track, creates a truly absorbing atmosphere. Hats off to Trilobyte for creating a truly immersive environment.

Exploration is accomplished using Trilobyte's now all-too-familiar "pointing skeletal finger" interface, which is tiresome at best. Navigation is a bit confusing due to the lack of smooth transitions (true also for previous Trilobyte games). It is sometimes difficult to determine whether the character has turned 45, 90 or 180 degrees. This proves very frustrating and disappointing, since these transitions are one of the main elements which made *The 7th Guest* so appealing. Some advances could have been made here.

Another strength of the game is its difficulty selection option. Experienced puzzlers can choose the "brave" level, while new gamers can learn the ins and outs of puzzle solving on the "nervous" setting. "Cowardly" is ridiculously easy (all puzzles are one move from being solved), and recommended only if you are eight years old or want to throw your money away.

Also included in the game is a virtual "Tour Guide of Castle MacPhiles," containing mildly interesting quasi-historical information. Much of it is told by the whimsical Fergus, so players do not have to read page after page of dry text interesting only to the designers and perhaps to fellow clansmen. Some of these stories and legends are actually fascinating and entertaining, although they do not add one iota to gameplay.

Although *Clandestiny* is a more or less decent game, the interface and puzzle style has definitely run its course. For anyone who truly enjoys puzzle games and has not grown tired of *The 7th Guest* and *The 11th Hour*, *Clandestiny* is certainly worth checking out; otherwise, think twice before purchasing the same contents in a different (and very plaid) package. *–Hermann K. Peterscheck*

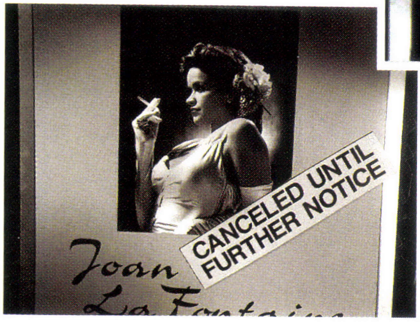
Noir

Cyberdreams

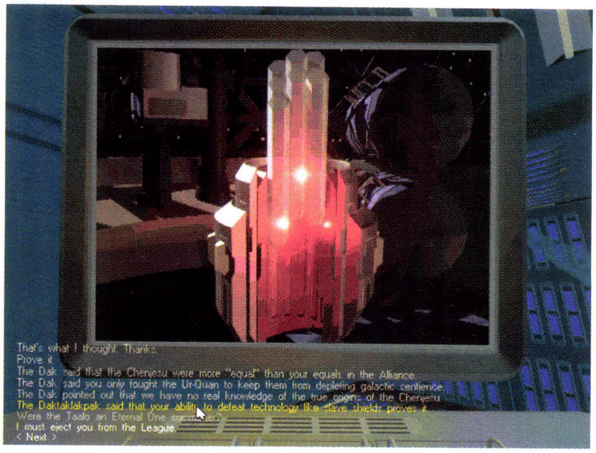
Windows, Macintosh

★★☆☆☆

Originally a term used by French film critics, *noir* was used to describe films from the 1940s and 50s characterized by their dark, somber tone and cynical, pessimistic mood. They usually took place in the criminal underworlds, where it was hard to tell the heroes from the villains. *Film noir* usually features a large number of night scenes, with gloomy compositions (using a lot of lighting effects, such as shadows of bars across the face of one who is guilty), and it's made something of a comeback in the pulpy action found in films like *The Last Seduction* and *Pulp Fiction*. However, it's the classics everyone remembers: *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Big Sleep*, *Double Indemnity* and *Sunset Boulevard* (among others).

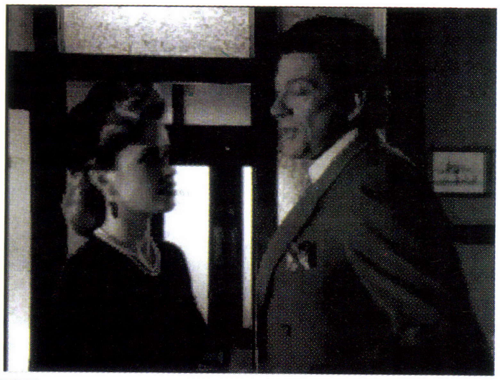


Cyberdreams has titled their latest adventure *Noir*, which unfortunately promises a lot more than it delivers. While it has some of the trappings of *noir*, it lacks much of the basic elements of the classics of the genre. All it can manage to duplicate is the setting; the richly photographed (in black and white), doom-laden streets of Los Angles in the 1940s (natives of the region will have fun picking out favorite monuments, like the Griffith Observatory and Union Station).



That's what I thought. Thanks.
Prove it.
The Dak said that the Chenjesu were more "equal" than your equals in the Alliance.
The Dak said you only fought the Ur-Quan to keep them from depleting galactic sentience.
The Dak pointed out that we have no real knowledge of the true origins of the Chenjesu.
The Daktaklakpak said that your ability to defeat technology like slave shields proves it.
Were the Taalo an Eternal One summoner?
I must eject you from the League.
< Next >

You start the game with six open cases; once you complete all six, you've "won" the game. Unfortunately, the designers have tried to link parts of the cases together with a story about Nazi plots, Chinese smugglers, wonder canines, washed-up actors, socialites and torch singers. While this structure allows you to move from case to case with relative ease if you get stuck (thereby making the game feel less linear), it really destroys the credibility of the story, which requires a stronger central plot to push the gamer along. Warning; skip ahead to the next paragraph unless you want to hear some of the discovered plot elements. You'll really have to suspend your disbelief to believe that Nazis infiltrated a woman's life in order to steal her dog to use it to steal books from an office of cryptography. To make matters worse, both the woman *and* a guy from the office hired the same detective in Los Angeles, and that there's a single woman who manages to figure in four of the cases, all in different capacities. It makes you think Los Angeles must have been a pretty small town in those days.



Noir

A weak story isn't the only problem with the game. *Noir* is quite easy, which isn't necessarily a bad thing when the story's strong (which it isn't), but it's easy because of a number of questionable design decisions. There are difficulty levels, but the toughest setting just turns off the smart cursor (reducing the game to a "click all over the screen" rather than a "pass the mouse over the screen waiting for the smart cursor to change" game). You use objects automatically when needed, and you use known combinations to safes automatically as well (don't bother taking notes; they're not needed). By taking out most of the brain work, very little actual detective work is required of the player.

Navigation through the environments is cumbersome at best, annoying at worst. The game is simple enough to operate; move the cursor to the edge of the screen and click if it becomes an arrow. Unfortunately, as is often the case with a game like this, getting from point A to B can require some incredibly weird maneuvering ("to get to that table on your left, move forward, left, up and right").

The weakest link in the game, though, is related to the sparse sprinkling of characters throughout. The game lacks a narrator, or a voice-over of the player character. This omission, perhaps a *noir* cliché the designers intentionally avoided, means that the player can be easily confused. Characters talk to you when you do something to trigger their appearance, but you never ask them questions, so you lose any context for what they're saying to you.

It's the non-player characters which disappoint the most. It's not the performances, which are consistently mediocre (except for the hysterics of the German butler; he overdoes it to the extreme). Rather, the characters are unmemorable, and anyone who's reveled in the richness of Raymond Chandler's prose will be disappointed by the mundane verbiage these characters spew. The game has been de-sexed (it's a gender neutral game), so you lose the crackling scenes where the femme fatales and the detectives spar in bouts of verbal foreplay.

The game also lacks the cynicism and feeling of impending doom that's so prevalent in the genre. The *denouement* is weak for a game in this style, with no scandals exposed, people ruined or feelings that you're helpless to confront the machinations of big business, government, or whatever (*film noir* was most popular during the cold war, when fear and paranoia was rampant). In general, *film noir* is a genre rich with gaming possibilities, but the game *Noir* chooses not to use a lot of what makes it so interesting. By taking the character out of *noir*, they've taken the character out of *Noir*. – *Steve Bauman*

Star Control 3

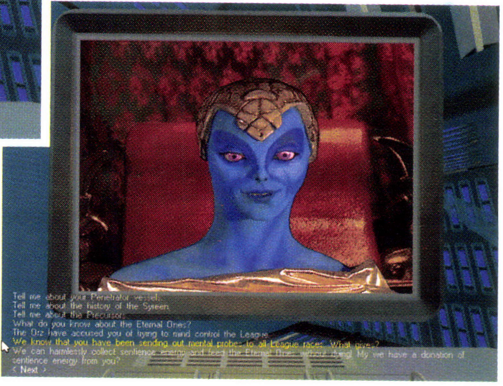
Accolade

DOS

★★½☆☆

The urge to explore has been a part of mankind since dirt. While few in former times could set forth on expeditions to terra incognita, lacking opportunity or perhaps

Star Control 3



Tell me about your Penetrator vessel.
Tell me about the history of the Syreen.
Tell me about the Precursor.
What do you know about the Eternal Ones?
The Orz have accused you of trying to mind control the League.
We know that you have been sending out mental probes to all League races. What gives?
We can harmlessly collect sentience energy and feed the Eternal Ones without [illegible]! My we have a donation of sentience energy from you?
< Next >

courage, CRPGs and adventure games let us go boldly into the great unknown, with nothing more to fear than a few cyberdeaths. *Star Control 3* is Accolade's third attempt to follow in the footsteps of the classic *Starflight*.

Hyperspace has gone awry, and except for the charming Precursor vessel you have built in your spare time since the last mission-to-save-sentient-space, everybody else is flatfooted and couldn't jump to another star system to save their collective bacon equivalents. Happily, your Precursor vessel has a different type of drive, and can shoot other ships into a general region of space. As the game begins, you are about to leave your new home in the Kessami Quadrant and go looking for the other races you seeded to check on their progress.

The routine of play is exploring systems, talking to races, procuring and fetching, while time flows along at a rate you set explicitly, from molasses to that of a cheap time-machine in a '50s B-movie.

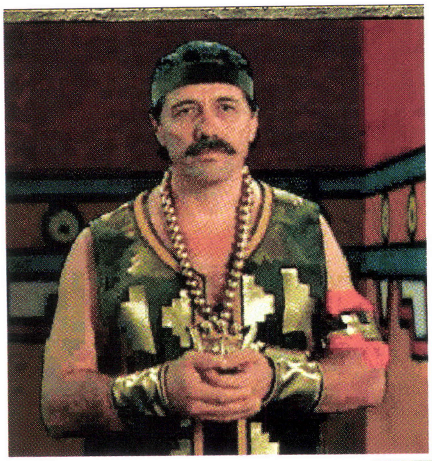
Graphics are SVGA and well done, with cut-scenes at significant points in the plot. Races are represented by a talking-head. Some of the fully rendered beings which actualize several of the races look really engaging. Others are stiff-moving, digitized puppets resembling David Brinkley guests having a bad satellite day. Music is okay, but loops too much.

Star Control 3 is not a game for the faint of ear. An enormous amount of dialog fills the majority of hours spent playing. Conversations consist of making choices among several comments or questions, and then listening to the stream of consciousness pouring forth in response. Each time you meet a new race, you must endure a raft of talking, with no opportunity to pause to make notes. I would swear the creators deliberately placed important clues just before a new conversation menu, so we'd have to go back and start over when something crucial flies by.

I am pleasantly surprised by the quality of the voice actors. Their personalities are well realized, truly alien and many times hilarious, especially the Orz. The response choices are wide-ranging, written with a wry wit, and allow you to determine when to play along and when to start hostilities. While moderately linear, there are allowances for missing plot lines. By the end of the game I had plenty of room to spare in meeting the end goal.

Combat is a small part of the game, which serves mostly to denote significant moments in the story. Combat also bears as much resemblance to the realities of physics and common sense as a Dali painting. Each side chooses one contender from his or her fleet; the survivor then faces the next enemy ship, until one side is totally eliminated. A planet is present in each round, which exerts a gravitational field limited in range, but immense in strength, dooming all but a few vessels to destruction should they wander too near. How *did* all these races escape into space, since they can't even *stay* in space once there?

Most of the "over 1000 worlds to explore" have nothing on them. Colonies are "managed" by pushing a few sliders around. Heck, you can win easily without ever establishing a single colony. Certain events *only* trigger with the passing of time, and are not tied to your actions. There is no feeling of being at war with the Crux once it happens. Your ships and theirs will exist in happy harmony, and they may not even react to your command fleet. Most annoying is being given no choice but to admit how poorly the war is going for you when you are kicking Crux posterior all over the quadrant, not to mention that the end of the game is abrupt, and doesn't tie much of anything together.



Yet for all of this I still couldn't escape *Star Control 3's* gravity well any better than one of the aforementioned doomed vessels. Totally addicted, I went for hours and hours without stopping. Only the desperate third and fourth pleas from bladder, belly or head were answered. I was alternately thoroughly caught up in the story and severely annoyed with game play. *–Samuel Brown Baker II*

The Crystal Skull

Maxis

Windows, Macintosh

★★⯪☆☆

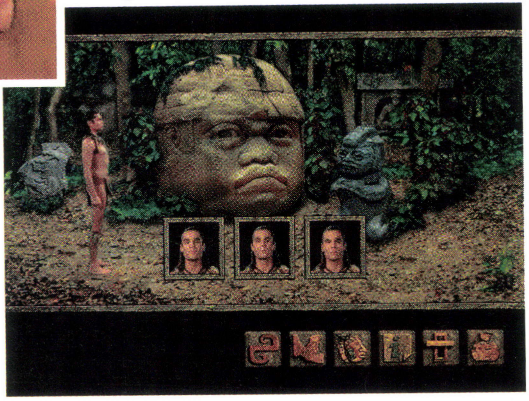
Wait! Don't turn off that online help option. Wait! Noooo! Give that "un-die" option a try. No? Oh well then, some very vexing hours lie ahead. SOME Interactive's *The Crystal Skull* is one cacophonous ball of wax. Even if you're a hard core genius, it will take a very long time to wade through this game without some assistance.

The setting is ancient Mexico in the time of the Aztecs. You are a birdkeeper named Quetzal, in the aviary of the Emperor Motecuhzoma, who has been chosen to retrieve a magical crystal skull without which the future of the Aztec empire is doomed.

The aforementioned cacophony exists for several reasons: First, the beautifully rendered authentically historical settings and costumes and the wonderful score and sound effects (kudos to Al Owens and Ron Reveira) are completely offset by the contemporary dialog and humor. We know what the designers were going for, but it doesn't work here. Next, the directional navigation disallows any unified feeling of setting when one continually enters a screen from a direction completely unrelational to that from which he exited the last screen. Exit left, enter left...huh? Finally, uneven performances and choppy FMV transitions coupled with some *very* unintuitive puzzle solutions and bad arcade sequences (why do designers *put* bad arcade in a richly designed adventure game?) make for an atmosphere of unintentional discord.

Enough of that. There is a lot to like about *The Crystal Skull*: men in loincloths, for instance (for those who take to that sort of thing); some very wonderful characters are able to overcome the script – our mentor Edward James Olmos makes the perfect Shaman, and our character, Quetzal, is handled well by Kevin Castro. A host of truly authentic looking Aztec characters in wonderful costumes inhabit a large and interesting world; and the 3D live creature animation is splendid. The puzzles which aren't totally in left field are well crafted and border on difficult.

The Crystal Skull



Adventurers new and old will really want to pack the online hints for this trip; so anyone who didn't heed the opening warning should quickly reinstall. You'll thank yourself later. *–Cindy Yans*

Spider-Man: The Sinister Six

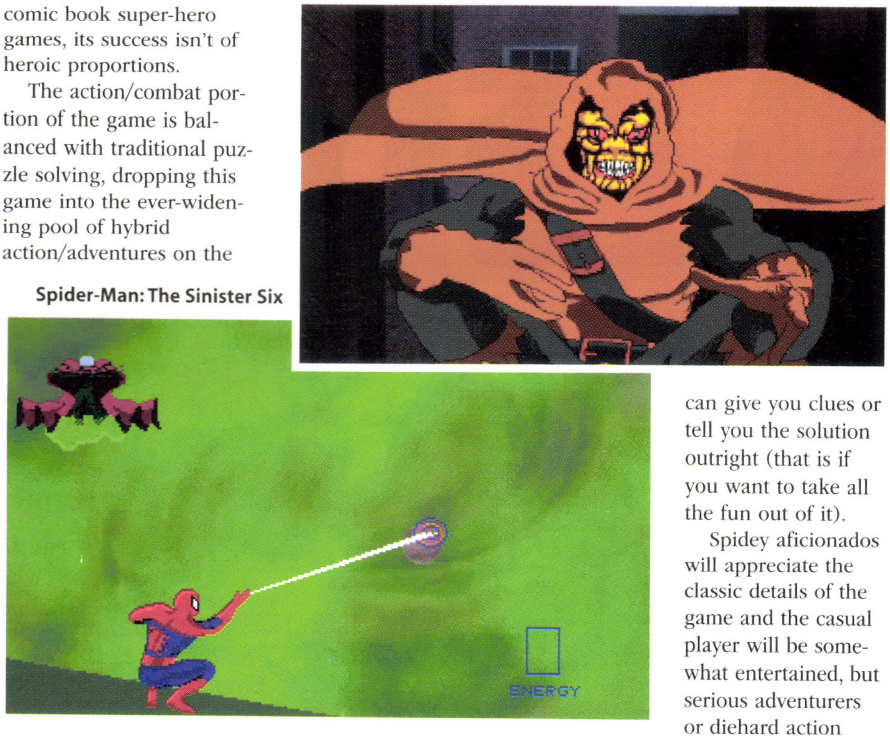
Byron Preiss Multimedia

DOS, Windows

★★⯪☆☆

Holy Webslinger Bat... Doh!...Wrong superhero. Regardless, the people at Byron Preiss have put out an official Marvel Comics game, *Spider-Man: The Sinister Six*. Even though this game helps to fill the obvious void of comic book super-hero games, its success isn't of heroic proportions.

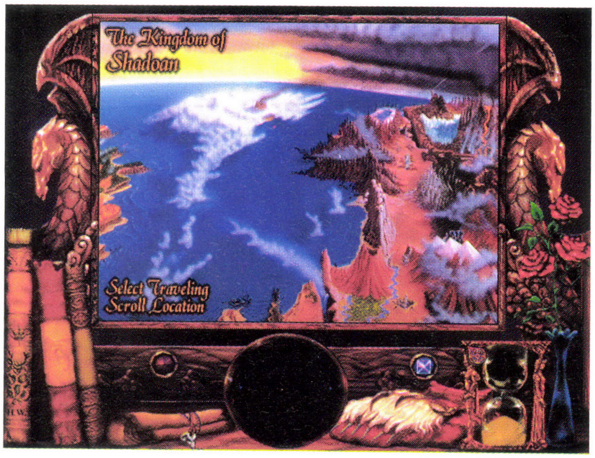
The action/combat portion of the game is balanced with traditional puzzle solving, dropping this game into the ever-widening pool of hybrid action/adventures on the market. The major problem here is that a few of the battle scenes are near duplicates of one another; the only real difference being which villain you are fighting.



Spider-Man: The Sinister Six

Spidey fans will find the game's approach follows the comics' pretty closely. His personality is witty and humorous when insulting the villains, and Spider-Man never actually dies — he just gets banged up a little bit (although he is unable to die, it's certainly still possible to lose the game).

You, as Spider-Man, must uncover the nefarious plot of Dr. Octopus, leader of the Sinister Six, the elite group of super-villains aiming to disgrace you, make everyone think you're a criminal, and then destroy you. Sure, you're a super-strong, agile, wall-crawling super-hero, but your wife Mary Jane isn't, and you also need to watch out for *her*. Don't expect a quick trigger finger to get you totally through this game; there's a storyline with which to contend. Although the story, and therefore the game, is a little bit short, it still upholds the classic comic book style — good guy solves puzzle, finds bad guy, insults bad guy, fights bad guy, etc. But don't get the wrong idea; the story has a *little* more depth than that.



Shadoan

For all levels of players, the combat and the puzzle portion each has its own difficulty rating. So, everyone from kids to adults can enjoy the mystery which can get tough in parts, but don't start sweating in your red and blue costume yet. There are hints that can give you clues or tell you the solution outright (that is if you want to take all the fun out of it).

Spidey aficionados will appreciate the classic details of the game and the casual player will be somewhat entertained, but serious adventurers or diehard action players will probably find this web to be a bit too transparent. *–William O. Nielsen*

Shadoan

Interplay

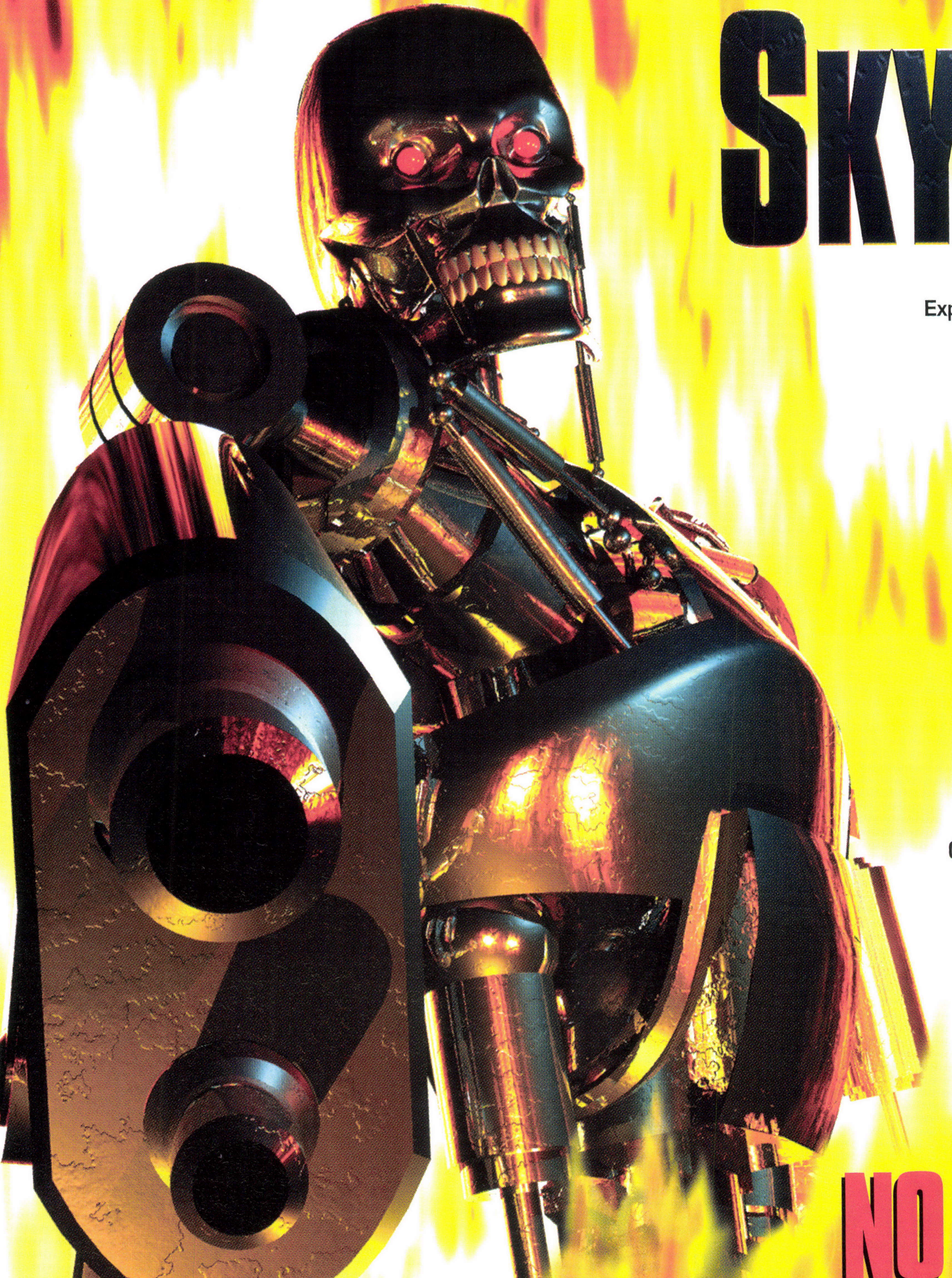
DOS

★⯪☆☆☆

What do you do if you're an editor who can't get any of your hard-core adventure reviewers to look at a game? Well, if you're the evil Cindy Yans, you find an innocent, fresh-faced, adventure gaming neophyte like myself to foist..., err, to assign it to. The game in question is *Shadoan*, sequel to Interplay's *Kingdom: The Far Reaches*. You are on a quest to assemble parts of a magic talisman you need to defeat a stereotypical evil wizard, and at the game's beginning you already have three of the parts you need (apparently found in the last installment).

The game is composed of animated

Goodness reflects the light; and evil, bears the seed of all darkness



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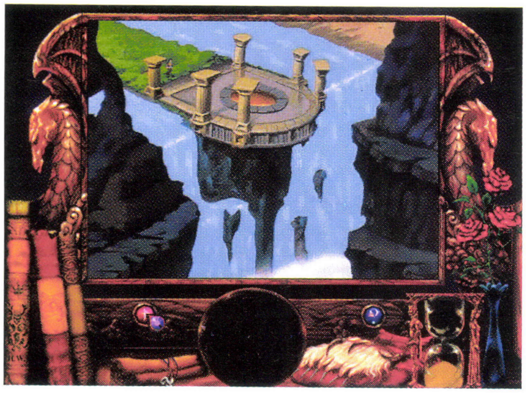
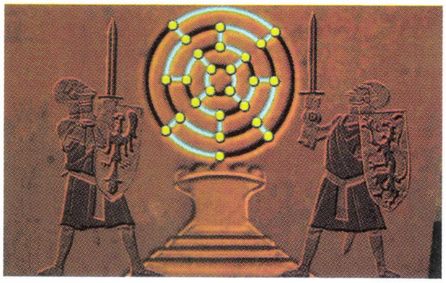
sequences (imagine the cartoon equivalent of full motion video and you get the idea). The background artwork is one of the few high points; generally, it's very appealing. The character animation is about the quality of Saturday morning fare I remember from childhood; nothing terrible, but no Disney. The dialogue and plot, however, are trite, simplistic, and corny; the thought of them still makes me shudder.



Shadoan

Play can best be described (using the voice of the Orcish narrator from *Warcraft II*) as "Choose right or die!" The design, even on the higher difficulty level, is generally much too simple, even for this adventure game klutz. The "puzzles," such as they are, are mostly of the "click on one of a number of options" variety; you just try out all the possible options (reloading each time you die) until you get the right one. I was able to blast through much of the game in just a couple of hours. Two exceptions were a puzzle at the end of the first CD and one at endgame; these caught me, not because they were good puzzles but because they were completely different in style from the rest in the game, and not logical anyway; experienced adventurers would probably find them solvable but dumb, and the beginners this game aims at would just be frustrated.



Drowned God

Lastly, the game box claims to be a "family adventure," yet it gets a "Teen" rating; of course, most teens I know would be bored to tears. An option exists for installing with a parental mode that basically cuts off the end of any animation where your character is killed, but some imagery remains even so which the tot set may still find disturbing: the Hangman's Tree with silhouetted skeletal corpses, your character's reanimation from a pile of bones, etc.

Overall, *Shadoan* is largely a disappointment. For an absolutely beginning gamer, and at the right price, it would be okay, but everyone else will want to pass. *–Scott Udell*

Drowned God

Inscape

Windows

★☆☆☆☆

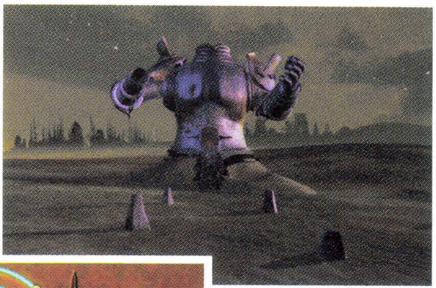
Every once in a while a game comes along which seems to do it all just right. A game with great graphics, awesome sounds, and absorbing gameplay which transcends the ages. It's a shame it had to be temporarily postponed in order to play *Drowned God*, from Epic Multimedia Group.

But first, it's only fair to expound on the appealing elements of the game….

All the good points aside, *Drowned God* immerses you in an empty, dismal, boring and strangely isolated *Myst* style of gaming misadventure. Clicking around each static location achieves the same higher level of consciousness toe puppets can aptly provide.

How much would you pay for this little gem? Don't answer yet. Because included free, for a limited time, are puzzles so cleverly disguised as stupid, simplistic, ritualistic drivel you'll honestly believe they're stupid, simplistic, and ritualistic drivel.

But wait; there's more. Don't forget the added benefits of a convoluted, disjointed, and awkwardly pieced together story line. Now throw in a sprinkling of a few video clips, all of which attempt to create the aura of a deep, dark introspective experience. Instead, you walk away with the feeling you should Pythonize your desktop.



As if this weren't already a steal of a deal, right now you can get all of this in one package for the low, low cost of quality time you could be using for more practical ventures (like gargling crude oil).

So run, don't walk, to your nearest software store, and cash in on this incredible deal. Operators are standing by as you play, patiently waiting to operate on you before *rigor mortis* sets in. After all, a game as bad as *Drowned God* is a shoe-in for getting a Codie award in the action category. *–Tim Royal*

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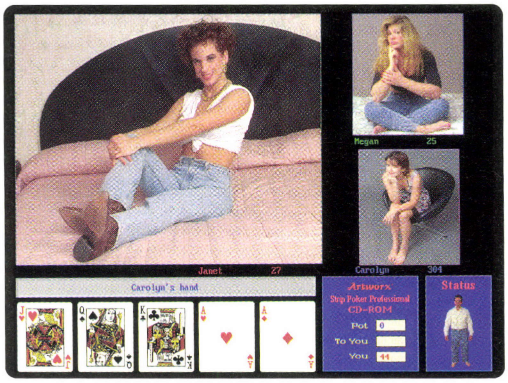
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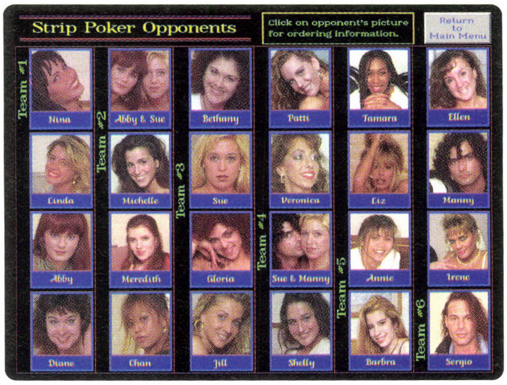
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Source: 10784

Spud

Gametek

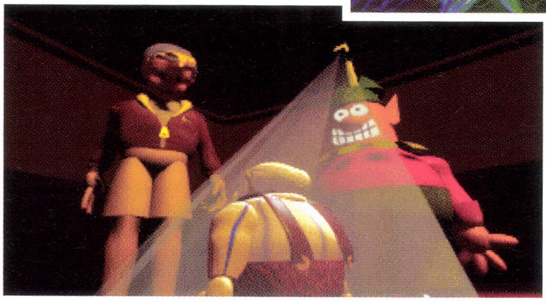
DOS, Windows 95

★★★☆☆

"It only looks like a kid's game," warns the box. Well, it doesn't lie. Although you see the innocuous, freckled Spud and initially chuckle at the "Teen" rating, you soon realize that *Spud*'s tongue-in-cheek humor is certainly not directed at small children. Throughout the game, from the initial *Psycho*-like music upon entering a blood-spattered Santa's workshop to the near conclusive confrontation with the gay elf, the player is treated to a wryly cynical view of a not-so-Christmas carol.

You control Spud, Santa's grandson, through a point and click adventure, the object of which is to find and rescue your grandfather, and perhaps save the world from the clutches of the Evil Dr. Chillblaine. It's no easy task. Amid drunken monkeys and gnomes, orangutans who sound like Bobcat Goldthwaite, and any number of other twisted characters, you travel to the South Pole to find and penetrate the Fortress of the Evil Doctor.

The gameplay is well balanced, with mostly intuitive, well constructed puzzle design (although a few chase sequences are absolutely *maddening*, and involve replay after replay after replay, with Spud dying every few seconds).



▼ Spud

Thank goodness the designers had the good sense to put the player back in a reasonable location in the game just prior to each death sequence; no reloading necessary.

Spread across two CDs, the game requires installing the first one, completing its story and receiving a password, then installing the second into a different directory and needing to produce the password at every future entry; not very handy. Despite a somewhat unwieldy inventory interface, occasional lockups (where *don't* we see them nowadays?) and some not-so-smooth transitions from first to third person, *Spud* stands up quite solidly as a worthwhile playing experience; and while it may not be *the* game of the year, there's plenty to enjoy – so visit Penguin Village with Spud. There's nowhere else you'll find a penguin with whom to discuss Barry Manilow. –*Cindy Yans*

Alien Incident

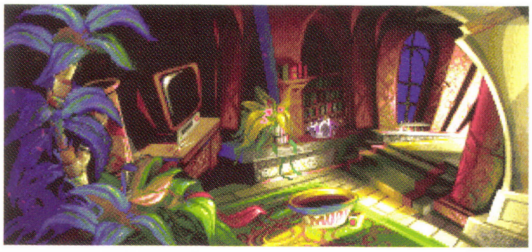
GameTek Inc.

DOS

★★★☆☆

It is a dark Halloween night and your uncle is testing his latest invention, a device which opens a rift between Earth and everywhere else in the universe. The only problem is, the machine works! An alien entity makes its way to Earth through the rift, but the real problem is that this entity is pursued by an alien warship… the crew of which don't appreciate their hunt being interrupted. Then, the disgruntled aliens beam down a team to capture the one responsible for their predicament – your uncle! You aren't noticed hiding in the lab; and so, your quest begins…

Game Tek's *Alien Incident* must have been developed with the fledgling gamer in mind, and in that sense seems to be going in the right direction. Along with its clever animation and interesting storyline, it reinforces to the new or younger gamer the idea that fun, challenging gameplay doesn't have to include violence. Parents will love this one.



▲ Alien Incident

The tone of the game is well established very early and nicely maintained throughout. You cannot hope to rescue your uncle and thwart the plans of the aliens without some obstacles, so there is, of course, the usual gathering and intelligent deployment of assorted objects for puzzle solutions.

On the down side, *Alien Incident* seems to crash and lock up every now and then. But even when this happens, the game has an automatic recovery system. For instance, if the game crashes for whatever reason, the next time you start the game you'll find it has performed a "disaster save," and asks if you want to start where you left off. Seems like they may have been *expecting* a crash or two, eh?

Parents will want to add this game to their shopping lists, as the story is fun and easy to follow and the interface intuitive enough to pick up with little or no coaching. Recommended primarily as family fare, this non-violent diversion should prove entertaining to Mom and Pop, as well as Billy and Sue Ellen… assuming they can withstand the occasional technical problems. –*William O. Nielsen*

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Devo Presents Adventures of the Smart Patrol

Inscape

Windows, Macintosh

⯪☆☆☆☆

Depending on who you ask, Devo were either ahead of their time, absolutely brilliant or minor one-hit wonders known for their seminal 80's tune "Whip It." After many years of nothingness, they've allowed their name to be attached to *Adventures of the Smart Patrol*, which would reinforce that "minor talent" tag. It's one of the worst games, for lack of a better term, released on CD-ROM this year.

The plot is your standard "bad things are happening and it's up to you to save the world." The Smart Patrol must find cure for Osso Bucco Myelitis, a disease that turns the residents of Spudland into jelly. You have to find Turkey Monkey before Rod Rooter, the big evil guy, as he/it has the cure. Or something like that.

Written by Gerald V. Casale, one of the original Spud-boys (and currently a director of music videos, most notably Foo Fighters' Devo-esque "I'll Stick Around"), with music by Casale and fellow spud Mark Mothersbaugh (who's been busy doing soundtracks), *Smart Patrol* could have been interesting. Instead, it's complete dreck, devoid of any logic or entertainment (perhaps that's its point: maybe it's ironic, yes it is…).

The "gameplay" redefines ineptness. The game is broken down into hours, and a certain number of mouse clicks or activities (it's not clear) advances time. Click a few times or leave a room, and suddenly an hour has passed. When you're actually working within the confines of the game world, you'll be hard pressed to figure out what to do. The gameplay is from the "click all over the screen and cool things will happen" school, and those "cool things" aren't. Gameplay takes a back seat to smug hipness, and you'll often feel like you're not quite getting the joke (it's ironic, remember?).

Devo Presents Adventures of the Smart Patrol

For a band that was known for its pioneering video work, *Smart Patrol*'s sub-par video is inexcusable. It's grainy, poorly integrated into the backgrounds, horridly acted and voiced with no semblance of synchronization between the two, and so self-consciously obtuse that only true Spuds with a Ph.D. in Devo-logy may actually be able to understand it.

Devo were always subverting their form. "Whip It" was a pop-song that was a blatant ode to masturbation, while their take on the Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" removed all of the sexuality from it and rendered it lifeless, to brilliant effect. *The Adventures of the Smart Patrol* renders the adventure game lifeless as well, with slightly less effective results. Please kill it before it spawns a sequel. – *Steve Bauman*

Secrets of the Luxor

Mojave

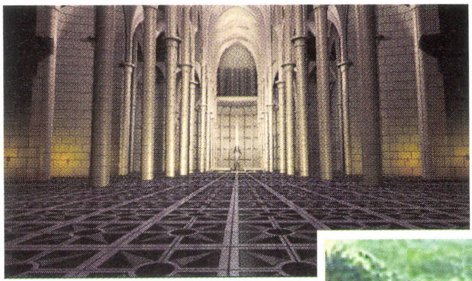
Windows

★★★☆☆

So you're looking pretty smug, huh? You conquered *Myst*, decimated *7th Guest*, and even figured out how to set the VCR to record shows, give or take a few adjoining time slots. Then along comes Mojave with their new title, *Secrets of the Luxor*, like a smoking buddy holding out his favorite pack gasping, "Here. Try *my* brand."

Much of the plot centers around an archaeological zealot named Osiris. His discoveries lead you to Egypt, from which you'll delve inside the great pyramids.

The game sports well designed, ingenious maps which capture the claustrophobic feel of the ancient Egyptian structures as you explore their catacomb-like halls.



Secrets of the Luxor

Short of *Lighthouse* from Sierra, *Secrets* contains the most intricate and complex arsenal of puzzles seen in recent months. Many of them require clues from multiple locations; it isn't uncommon to have several rooms comprise a larger puzzle. Instant gratification advocates will be sorely displeased when their brilliance in deduction nets them just a hint of a sound in some unknown room far beyond.

A well-written plot unfolds during the course of *Secrets*, and a satisfying (but brief) ending proffers a pleasing conclusion to your journey. On the flip side, much of the game reveals little of the story's relevance, and at times feels as disjointed as watching every third episode of a soap opera ("Barney did what? To who? For *how* many cookies?!?").

Interaction funnels down to the specific predestined puzzles. Much of the game world is static and unreachable. Want to examine that wall with the scantily clad Egyptian scrawling of Pillsba, Goddess of Cookie Dough? Sorry, it's not in the game plan.

Still, *Secrets of the Luxor* offers much in the way of challenging game play. What it does, it does well. What it's missing in depth can be forgotten, given that it's challenging enough for many hours of play. As for the complexity of the puzzles? Well, as any non-smoking buddy would say, "Watch out. Those things will kill ya." –*Tim Royal*

The Gene Machine

Vic Tokai

Windows

★★★⯪☆

As Americans, we owe much to the British. We reap the silent sophistication of Monty Python; the slapstick burlesque of the Princess Di and Charles marriage; and most of all, the timeless melodies of the Weasles, or whatever band it was that came out of Liverwurst. It all pales compared to *The Gene Machine,* a new adventure from the folks at Vic Tokai.

At the outset, a simple scene sends you into the world of Piers Featherstone as he is coaxed by a mysterious talking cat into undertaking a perilous journey. Apparently a dastardly scientist has discovered that genetic tissue, while always a great stocking stuffer, also doubles as a wonderful tool to concoct mutant armies to take over the known world.

The graphics in *Gene Machine* are hand-drawn illustrations which easily enrapture the player into this rag tag universe where past meets present. Many of these artistic backdrops could easily be displayed as art at elegant establishments, like Motel 6.

The Gene Machine

Each member of the cell-animated cast of characters adds perfectly to the overall story. So much so, in fact, that they'll begin to seem like friends or enemies, not like digitized logic fodder probed for the usual obligatory information.

Nothing trips up adventure games more than faltering in the area of story development. There's no such trap sprung in this game, however, as the plot unfolds masterfully. Through parody, irony, tragedy, and a few subtle barbs at anything and everything, the wacky world of England becomes alive in this rich and absorbing tale.

Despite the fact that most of the puzzles are fairly easy to solve, *The Gene Machine* serves notice that it's a game to be reckoned with. It's a delightful romp filled with anecdotes, talking cats, and enough irony to make Guybrush Threepwood himself shoot grog from his nostrils in glee. –*Tim Royal*

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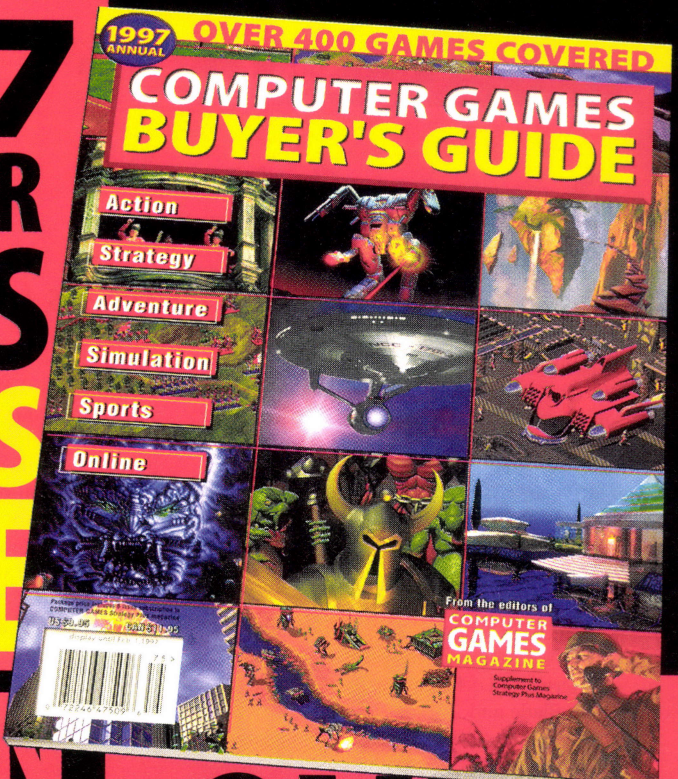
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30 PLAYABLE DEMOS

by Andy Backer

Daggerfall

Unca kicks crypts as daggers fall

Daggerfall is big and intimidating! It's also the best role-playing game of the year. Here are some hints and tips to make it easier for you to play.

Who should I be?

Select a High Elf from Summerset. They have a natural immunity to paralysis, and make great fighter/magic users. Now, select "Custom" from the list of classes.

Select the following Minor skills: Short Blade, Restoration, Mysticism, Blunt Weapon, Archery and Lockpicking. Select Destruction, Long Blade and Alteration as your Primary skills and select Axe, Thaumaturgy and Illusion as your Major skills.

Now, add the following Advantages: Increased Magery (3X Intelligence in Spell Points), Heal Rapidly (General) and Bonus Points to Hit Daedra. Add the following Disadvantages: Hand-to-Hand under Forbidden Weaponry; Leather Armor under Forbidden Armor; Buckler and Round shield under Forbidden Shields; and Iron, Silver and Adamantium under Forbidden Materials.

When rolling and distributing attribute points, try to end up with sixty points in as many of the attributes as possible, particularly Intelligence, Strength, Agility and Endurance.

When distributing skill points, distribute equally among the Primary, but make sure Axe and Illusion have the most points of the Major skills, and Short Blade has the most points of the Minor.

"Alteration," "Illusion," "Knowledge," "Rabbit," "Socializing with aristocrats," "Kynareth," "The glorious Dragons" and "Getting along with others" are good answers to some of the twelve questions. Answer "Ebony dagger" and "A favorite book" to get an incredible weapon and something valuable to sell.

Beginning tips

How to get level raises

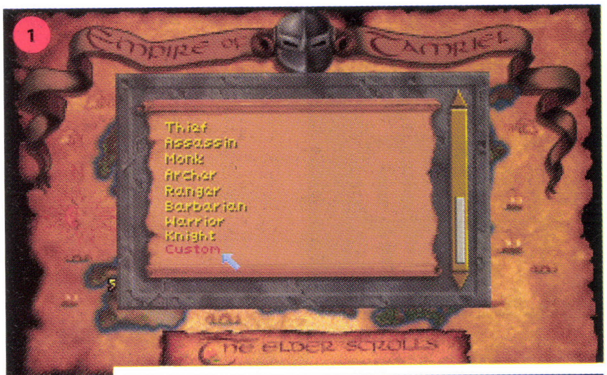
Level raises are based on your three Primary, best two Major and single best Minor skills. After you've gotten your first level raise, you have to raise these six skills by a total of fifteen points to get another raise. This often entails increasing each of the six skills by one and any combination of them by nine more.

You don't have to be in combat to increase most magic skill points.

Casting Slowfalling (and resting) repeatedly will increase your Alteration skill. Casting Chameleon will do the same for Illusion (once you've cast a spell, press the letter Q to repeat the cast). However, Shock does have to be cast during battles to increase Destructive skill.

How to get invited to join the Thieves' guild

In the starter dungeon there is a room with a horseshoe table and an Archer behind it. Change your grab icon to steal and enter. Repeatedly click on the Archer to pick his/her pockets. If you pick his/her pocket at least ten times successfully, you'll get a letter asking you to join the Thieves' Guild after you get to Daggerfall city.


1
Empire of Tamriel
Thief
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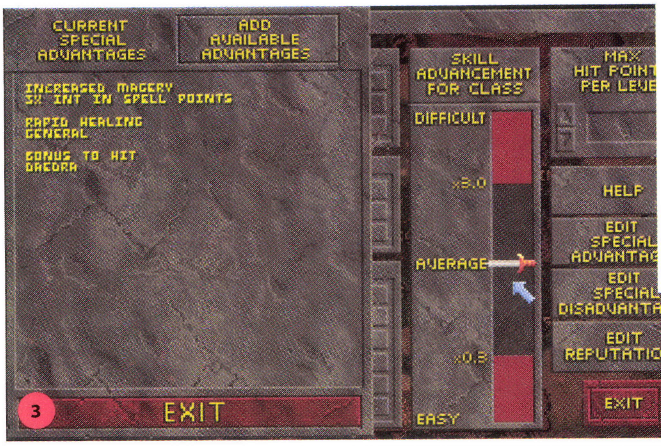
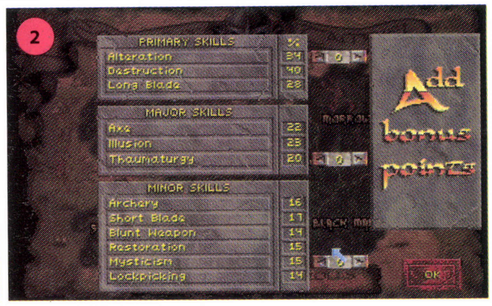
Knight
Custom
The Elder Scrolls


3
CURRENT SPECIAL ADVANTAGES
ADD AVAILABLE ADVANTAGES
INCREASED MAGERY 3X INT IN SPELL POINTS
RAPID HEALING GENERAL
BONUS TO HIT DAEDRA
EXIT
SKILL ADVANCEMENT FOR CLASS
DIFFICULT
x3.0
AVERAGE
x0.3
EASY
MAX HIT POINT PER LEVE
HELP
EDIT SPECIAL ADVANTAG
EDIT SPECIAL DISADVANTAGES
EDIT REPUTATIONS
EXIT


2
PRIMARY SKILLS
%
Alteration 34
Destruction 40
Long Blade 28
MAJOR SKILLS
Axe 22
Illusion 23
Thaumaturgy 20
MINOR SKILLS
Archery 16
Short Blade 17
Blunt Weapon 14
Restoration 15
Mysticism 15
Lockpicking 14
Add bonus pointz
OK

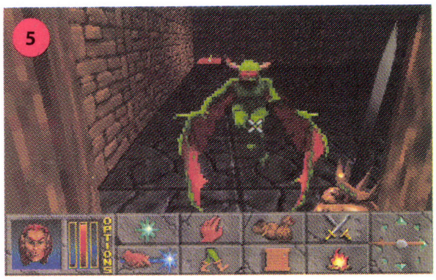
[1] Select Custom from the list of classes

[2] Select your Primary, Major and Minor skills

[3] Add special advantages and disadvantages

[4] Look down (press the Delete key) to see and kill the Rat

[5] Skip the Imp and come back if it's too tough



After you've finished the starter dungeon

Press the W key to bring up the world map. Daggerfall province flashes red. Click on it, then click on the Find button. Type "Daggerfall," and go to Daggerfall city.

A kingdom for a horse

Stop the first citizen you see, and ask for the location of all the shops, taverns and guilds. Keep asking until s/he indicates the location on your map.

Turn south to get to the King's Pawnshop. If you get there before it opens (at nine), click on the Rest icon and select Loiter. Never rest in

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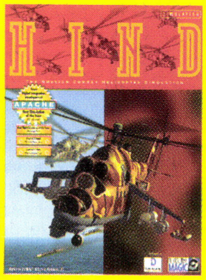
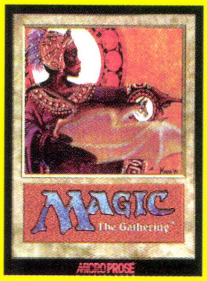
'KILLING TIME' is no shallow grave. Its' depth is very well conceived. Puzzle solving and strategic thinking are placed at a premium. The visceral violence is complimented by paranormal graphics and a super storyline. **CD $40**

'LOONY LABYRINTH' Board the Loony Machine for a pinball adventure, with championship playfield design, expert flip control, authentic light illumination, spectacular sound and 2 kinds of background music. **$29**



'HIND' The Hind contains a free for all arcade mode so new simulation enthusiasts can jump right into the cockpit and quickly enter combat action. For veteran players, this game contains a detailed mission planner! **CD $44**

'THRUSTMASTER GRAND PRIX 1' Gives you the competitive edge with variable throttle and braking at your fingertips and lightning fast thumb activated shifting. Securely clamps to your desktop. Total steering range is 180 degrees of travel. **$74**

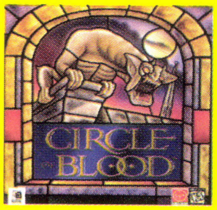


'MAGIC: THE GATHERING' This top selling trading card game is now, for the first time, an interactive multiplayer online computer game. It's an addictive fantasy game featuring wizards, exploration, adventure and role playing. **CD $46**

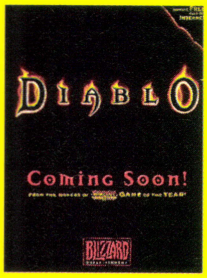
Available Now!

'CH PRODUCTS F-16 FIGHTER STICK' Features the most realistic Falcon jet stick grip ever! When used in conjunction with the Pro Throttle all 20 buttons become programmable for a total of 40 functions. 3 year warranty! **$96**

'JOYSWITCH' Now you can jump from joystick to joystick, game to game with the speed and ease of turning a switch. No more reaching behind your computer to swap joystick cables on the game port. Joyswitch does it all. **$39**



'CIRCLE OF BLOOD' An American happens into a Parisian cafe. After a clown blows the place to smithereens, he wants answers. He finds a 14th century order called The Knights Templar. Unlock the secret of this intriguing adventure and the vicious conspiracy that threatens to reshape the world. **CD $43**



'DIABLO' As a young boy, you return to your village to find it razed and your family dead. Exploration of the countryside reveals that a similar fate has befallen all the neighboring towns, except for one. **CD $46**

'PRIVATEER 2: THE DARKENING' You decide what challenges each day should include: scouting a dangerous sector, hunting down a wanted criminal, defending an embattled planet, escorting a vulnerable transport, delivering a valuable cargo, flying recon and many more to choose from. **$49**

'MASTER OF ORION II' In the deepest reaches of outer space, a xenophobia race lurks in the darkness, planning their revenge. Use multi-player feature by challenging friends over modem, network or compete in the hot seat. **CD $46**

'THRUSTMASTER PHAZER PAD' is the first gamepad of its kind to offer precise control and maximum performance, its also completely user programmable with its press and hold interface! **$47**

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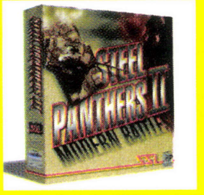

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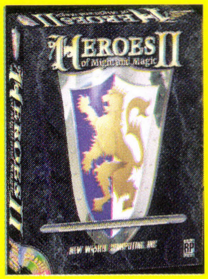

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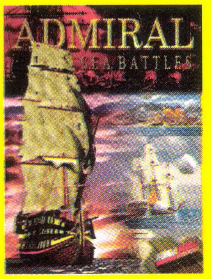

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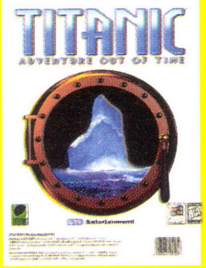

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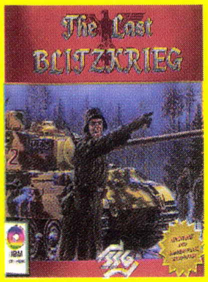

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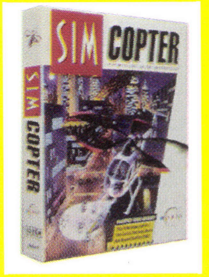

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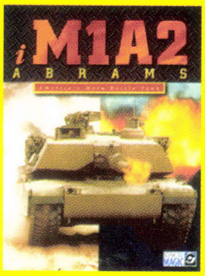

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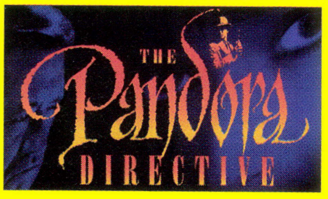

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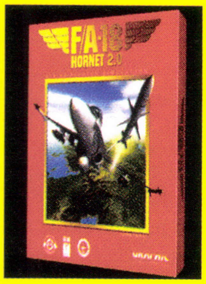

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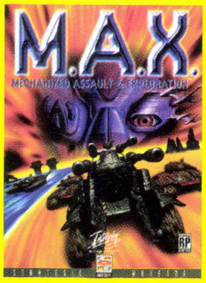

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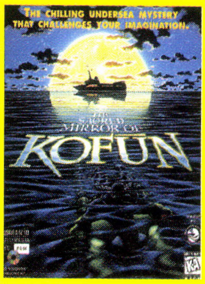

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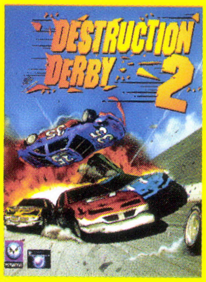

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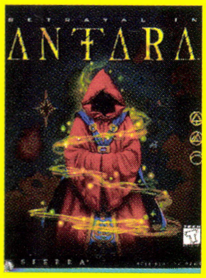

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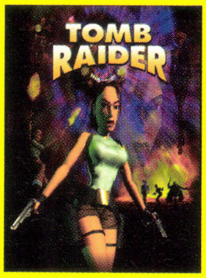

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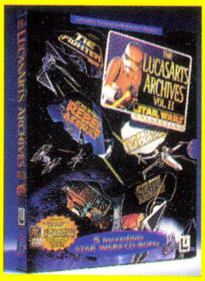

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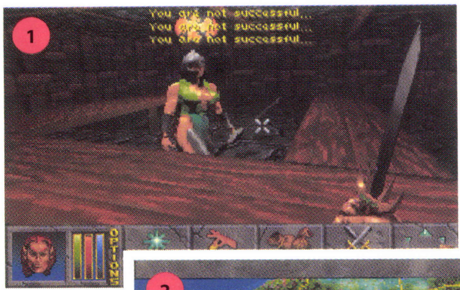
town except at an Inn or in the Fighter's Guild. You can Loiter as long as you like, however. Do not stay out in the streets of Daggerfall City at night. The ghosties will get you.

Enter the Pawnshop and sell your excess goods to the proprietor. Search for a General Goods store and buy a horse and cart.

Crypt kicking for fun and profit

Press the W key again. Select Daggerfall province and press the Find button. Type "Copperston Crypts." If it's dark, loiter until the sun rises. Ride your horse straight ahead (press the T key and select Horse), and enter the cemetery and then the crypt. It's only a four room dungeon (click on the open coffin within the circle of candles to open a secret door to the fourth room), with only a couple of monsters to kill.

Exiting restores the Crypt with new monsters to kill and treasure to find. Load your wagon with a couple of hundred pounds of loot (it holds a thousand) and return to Daggerfall to sell it (deposit your gold in a bank and exchange it for a letter of credit).



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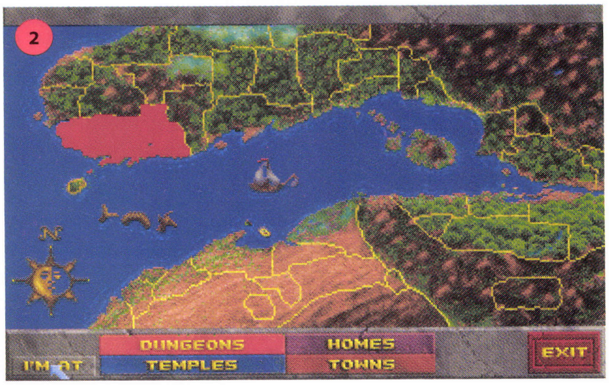

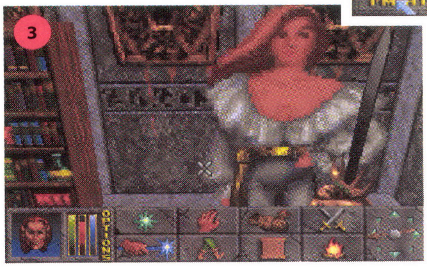

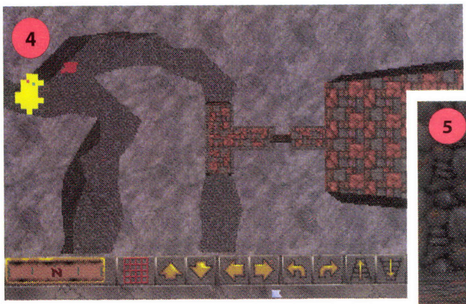

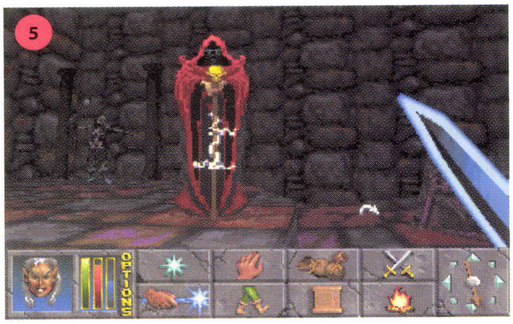

[1] Pick the Archer's pocket ten times and you'll get a letter asking you to join the Thieves' Guild

[2] Click on Daggerfall Province (in red) and then the Find button and type "Daggerfall" to go to the city

[3] This Mage in the Mages' Guild will allow you to make spells

[4] Turn right at the fork and then left at the door to meet the King of Worms

[5] The King of Worms is the tall fellow with the weird eyes

Making spells and whoopee

Join the Mages' Guild. Buy a ready-made Fireball spell from a Mage in the lobby. Visit Elausa Wickstem (the Spell Maker) and make the following Caster Only spells: Water Walking, Water Breathing, Open, Spell Reflection, True Invisibility, Levitate, Recall (Teleport), Heal Health, Shield and Cure Disease. Make the Single Character From A Distance spells Damage, Health, and Silence as well.

Lady Brisienna writes a letter

Meet Brisienna, Lady Magnessen, at the location outside of Daggerfall City she mentions in her letter. Do not accept any other quests from royalty until you are at least level four.

To raise levels, go back to Copperston Crypt and kill more monsters; practice casting your magic spells, particularly Water Walking, Water Breathing, Chameleon and Damage Health.

If you want to glom onto some quick gold, steal weapons from the Odd Blades shop in Daggerfall. Rent a room in the Tavern next door. After midnight, cast an Open spell on the shop's door and loot the joint. Sell everything to the same shopkeeper in the morning. Heh-heh.

The best of the quests

Go to The Mages' Guild for the easiest, quickest and most rewarding quests. Select only the guard duty type. The best of these begin immediately in the Mages' Guild upon acceptance, and are over in three hours (game time). Magic items are usually offered as rewards, and the loot from the attacking Thieves is excellent. It is possible to complete several of these quests a day and thus progress rapidly in rank, level and wealth.

Another easy quest is the one offered to join the Thieves' guild (use the Open spell to get into the locked residence). Join the Fighters' Guild, The Temple of Kynareth and the Knights of Dragons for even more quests, but be very careful. Save to a separate file *before* undertaking them, and save separately *during* them. Quests involving large, randomly constructed dungeons can be very difficult, especially those that have to be completed within minimal time limits; your reputation suffers if you fail.

Morgiah's quest

Meeting Brisienna begins the Main Quest quests. When you've reached level four, visit Morgiah (after she's sent you a letter). Morgiah, Princess of Wayrest (select Wayrest province; use the Find button, type "Wayrest" and go to the Palace) wants you to deliver a letter to the King of Worms in Scourg Barrow (select Dragontail Mountains province, the Find button then type Scourg Barrow).

Cast Recall (the Anchor part of the Teleport spell) upon entering the dungeon. There are seven coffins inside. The second coffin on the left opens over a pit. Cast Levitate, and float down. Cast True Invisible before entering the room full of zombies. You'll then be able to walk through the room safely. Exit through the first door on your left. Go through the door at the end of the hall, rest, and turn left. Follow the right wall of the cave hall. It will branch to the right. Enter the first door to the left and go to the back of the room to talk to the King of Worms. The King will give you a letter to take back to Morgiah in Wayrest. Teleport back to the dungeon entrance. Go to Wayrest and talk to Morgiah. Morgiah names Mynisera as a source for further information after you've won her trust.

Cyndassa's quest

Before undertaking Cyndassa's quest, you should have advanced to level five. Cyndassa is Mynisera's maid servant. She is in the back room to the left of the stairs up to the throne in Daggerfall's Palace. Mynisera (the former Queen) is in the back room to the right, but will not talk to you until after you've completed Cyndassa's quest.

Cyndassa wants you to kill a werewolf. The werewolf is in a randomly constructed dungeon. Save to a separate file after fighting the beast. There is a small chance of being infected by the werewolf's bite and turning into a werewolf yourself. After you've safely killed the beast (with the Ebony Dagger or a Dwarven Sword) return to Cyndassa.

More Main Quest tips next month. ■

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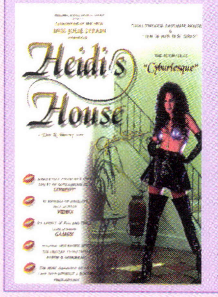

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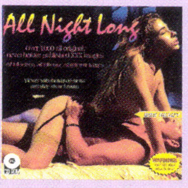

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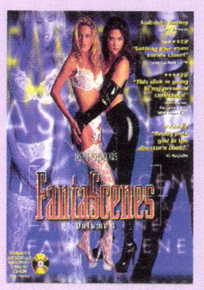

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SPLUS197A1

by Steve Wartofsky

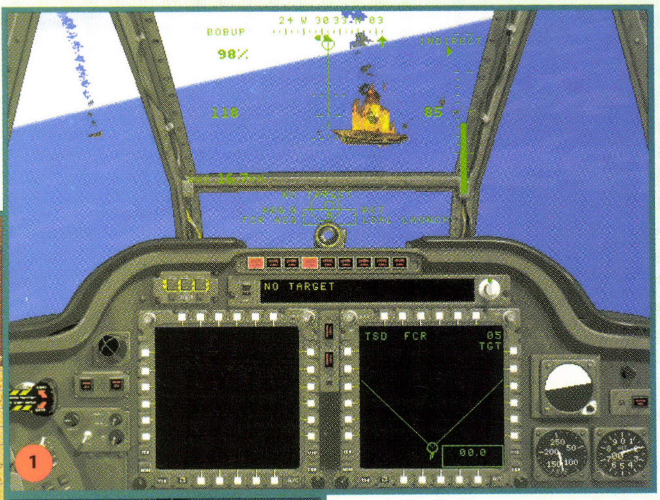
The Hangar

If only they'd get it right…

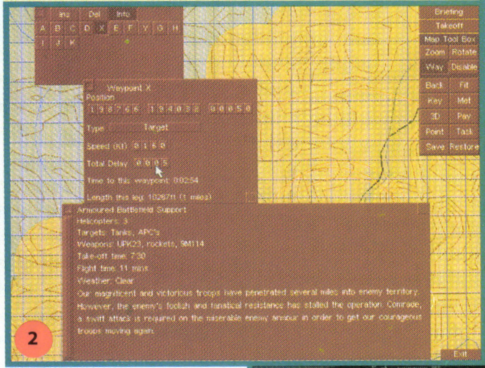
I hear regularly from flight sim players of all sorts, some new to the genre, some veterans of almost a decade of playing with these things; some real pilots, some who'd rather do anything than get in a real airplane. One universal crops up regularly among all of them: "I wish they would just get it right."

People who tried to enjoy the air combat sim of air combat sims, *Falcon 3.0*, have basically been waiting for about four years for someone to do nothing more than just an SVGA *F3* with all the pieces in place, functioning correctly, no memory or configuration or joystick problems, dynamic campaign engine, and all the rest of it. It's striking that no-one out there has attempted to achieve such a feat (though *Falcon 4.0*, of course, should push the envelope here). Everyone seems to be aiming at getting one or another of the pieces right, but no-one's going for the whole enchilada. My impression is that most air combat sim enthusiasts *want* the whole enchilada. Anything short of such a goal is frustrating.

I think the most important issue for most players is, in fact, not so much the flight modeling or instrument modeling or graphics quality as the dream of a working, dynamic campaign engine. The persistent groans of irritation over *EF2000*'s failure to get things right here – and the persistent desire to see DID get it right – suggest as much. The sad thing is, only a couple of design groups seem to be continuing the attempt to implement such a system now. The general reaction by many has been that attempting to put together such an engine is too ambitious, since it's proven (so far) impossible to control the results well enough to guarantee any semblance of accuracy or realism in the interactions between air and ground opponents run by the computer. This looks like part of the industry-wide pulling away from the effort to implement anything resembling a functional AI for computer gaming; efforts which could have been made to improve AI are being replaced now by efforts to get multi-player working, even if it does mean at best a fully functional multi-player capability built into a single product, hooked across an internet with enough latency these days to bore a Galapagos turtle.



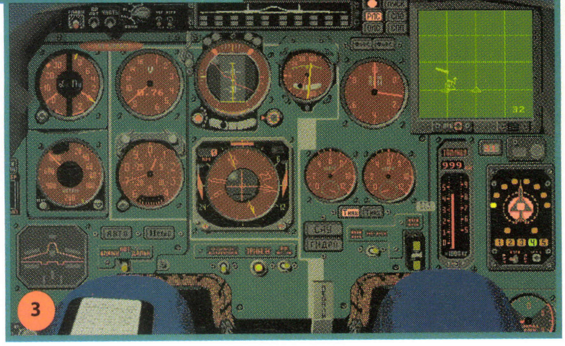
[1] Flash Point Korea improves Longbow's ground-to-air routines substantially



Waypoint X
Position
198766 184032 00050
Type Target
Speed (kt) 0150
Total Delay 0005
Time to this waypoint 0:02:54
Length this leg: 10267ft (1 miles)

Armoured Battlefield Support
Helicopters: 3
Targets: Tanks, APC's
Weapons: UPK23, rockets, 9M114
Take-off time: 7:30
Flight time: 11 mins
Weather: Clear
Our magnificent and victorious troops have penetrated several miles into enemy territory. However, the enemy's foolish and fanatical resistance has stalled the operation. Comrade, a swift attack is required on the miserable enemy armour in order to get our courageous troops moving again.

[2] This is the kind of screen most air combat sim players would love to spend more time with, if it actually paid off during the mission

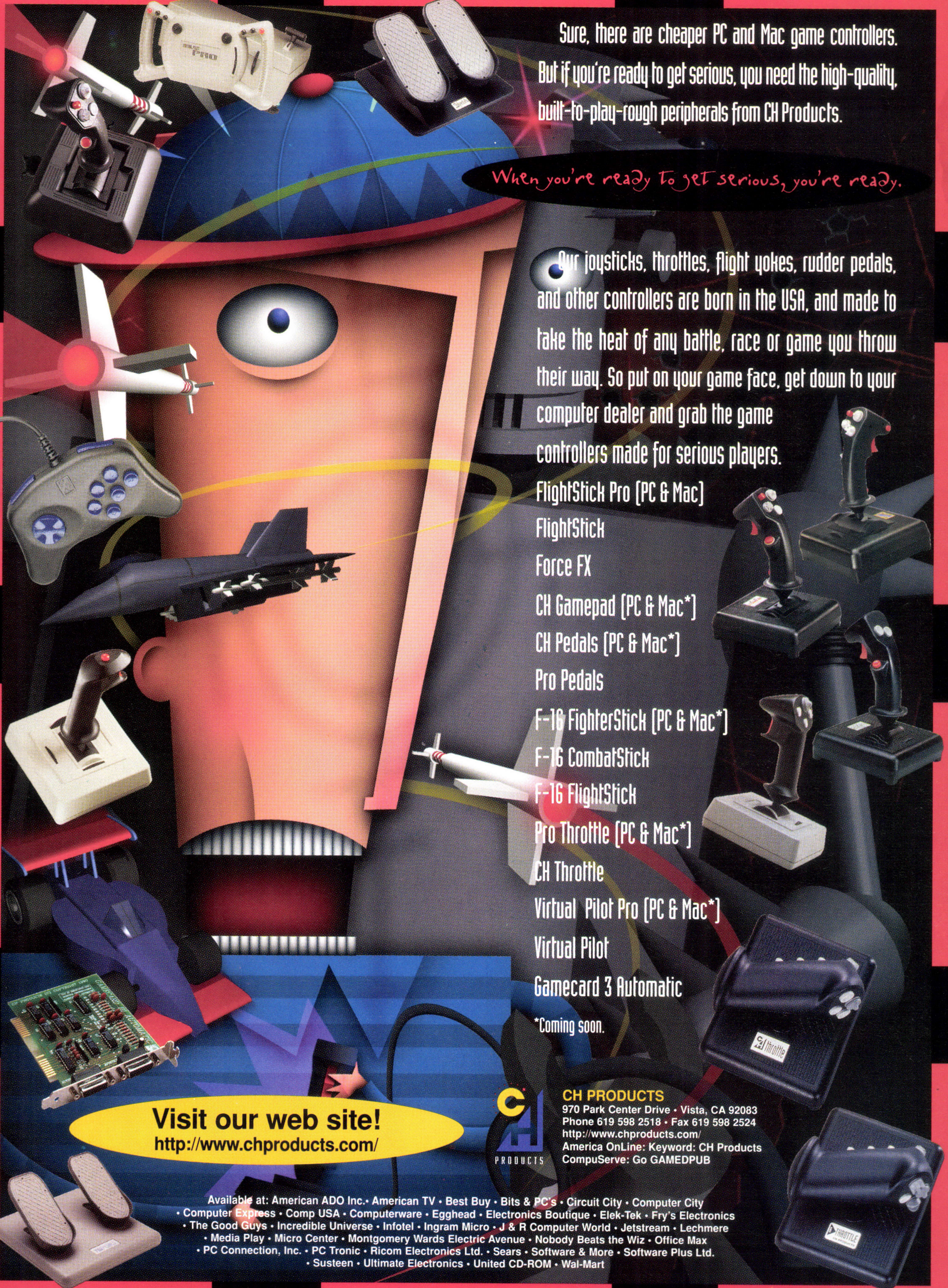


[3] Ground radar in Su-27 proves this part of the design can be done right

Why is AI being pushed to the background of development, when, from all accounts, it's the one area most gamers agree they'd like to see improved dramatically? The claim that it's too difficult, or that past efforts have failed or been met with overwhelming criticism should not be an excuse to simply give up and put resources into other areas of the design. Improving the graphics and multi-player capability are only going to go a little ways towards expanding the audience for flight and air combat simulation, but they seem to be the places where designers feel confident they can *make* improvements. There's no hot technology specifically linked to gaming AI which everyone's talking up, the way there is with graphics (3D accelerator cards and chips) and multi-player (internet, ISDN, cable, etc.). Artificial intelligence, or at least competent, computer-based opposition in a game or simulation is also a much more nebulous thing to define; what some players see as sufficient challenge or adequate realism, others will find ludicrous. There should be some clear set of definitions which everyone can discuss, which define the areas within which computer opponent design are taking place.

In air combat simulation, some of those definitions are already in place: computer-generated aircraft opponents should use both the horizontal and vertical planes for offensive and defensive maneuvers; they should use missiles and guns at appropriate distances and rates of closure; and they should combine forces appropriately against the player. Player allies should respond appropriately to player actions and commands. This much has reached a point of relative effectiveness in some sims, and sufficiently clear definition, to be assessed by most players when they encounter a new design. *Apache*, *Su-27* and *Hind* are my own personal benchmarks here.

What's been left behind most are ground-to-air forces – SAMs, AAA, ground radar detection and allocation of computer opponent resources – and, fortunately, some development is taking place here, too (*Flash Point Korea*). An ancient MicroProse title – *F-117A* – did a great job of at least setting the terms for what should be considered in this area of simulation development; it remains for a future sim to meet those terms, best the dynamic *Falcon 3.0* engine, and give air combat sim fans everything they've ever wanted. ■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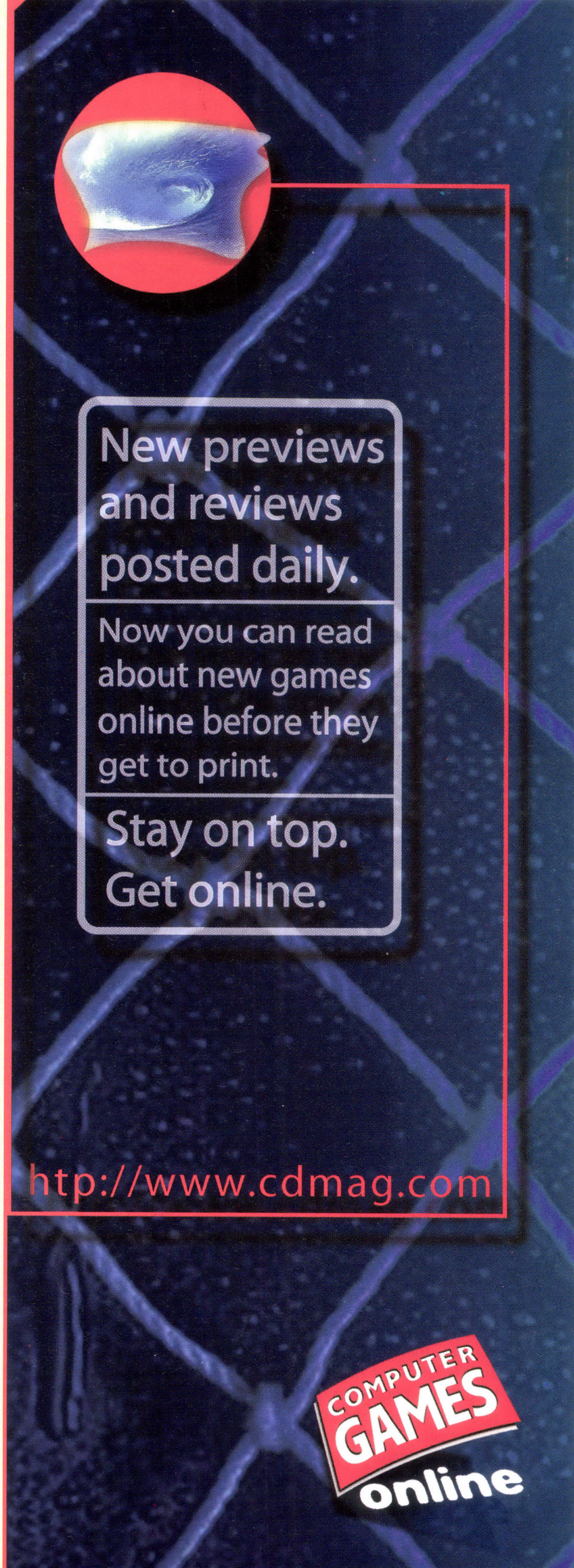
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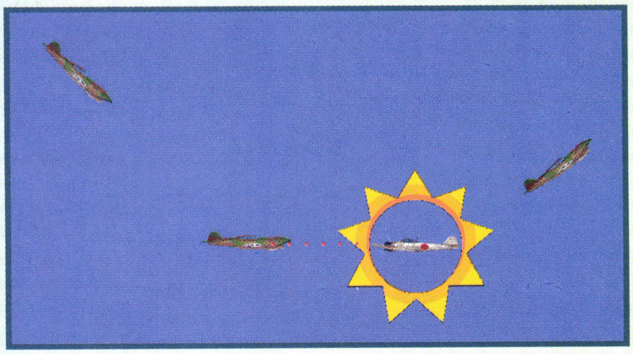
by Ben Chiu

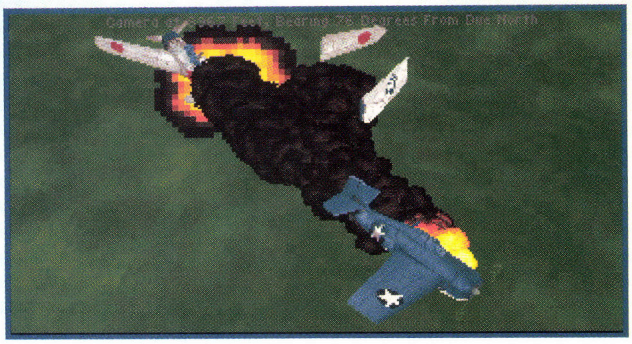
Air Combat Advisor

Boom and Zoom

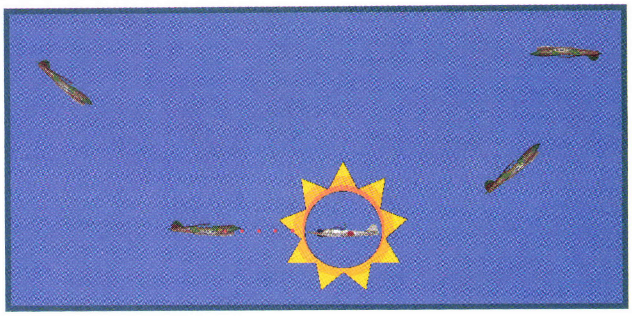
Now that we've covered enough of the basics to move on, this month we'll begin discussing basic tactics. However, before we begin, please allow me to offer a couple of differing opinions on air combat training just to keep things interesting. Now, far be it for me, a computer nerd/civilian, to go against conventional air combat wisdom currently being taught in the military; however, I believe that the proverb "air combat is not fought like a chess match… move, counter-move... it's a fluid kind of thing," is a little misleading, if not totally wrong. It could be settled as a matter of semantics and taken totally out of context, but let me explain why I say this.



The most basic description of the BnZ consists of a dive, a blast of gun fire as you close followed by a high speed climb out of harms way



The general concensous is the term "zoom" refers to the high speed extension. Just exactly what "boom" refers to is another story. Some pilots say that it refers to the dive, while others insist that it refers to the actual attack. Well, we're pretty sure what the "boom" means in this Boom And Zoom encounter



Regardless of how you label each section, the BnZ actually consists of four basic steps rather than three; dive, attack, extend, and a reversal

While I'll agree that air combat is fluid, during my years of martial arts training, the art of fighting was taught exactly move, counter-move. After years of repetition and learning variations and options, your "fighting style" becomes a fluid motion. Eventually, you act by instinct rather than by a long arduous thought process. It's kind of hard to explain unless you've experienced it, but to me, combat is combat and I believe air combat could be taught roughly the same way. Now please don't quote me out of context here, and bear with me a little longer before you start flaming me and sending hate mail. Yes, the Japanese in WWII tried this approach and it failed. Among other things, I believe one reason was because of the limited time and resources available to train pilots. Training of this type would require many years (just as in the martial arts) rather than a few months. However, I believe the biggest problem was the rigid, limited adherence to text-book training. This produced the lack of encouragement of "free thinking" and "innovation" that hurt the Japanese the most (not having firsthand knowledge of the situation at that time, I base these conclusions on what I have read). Nevertheless, given time, I believe true mastery of air combat could happen even in the traditional martial arts training method of move, counter-move. In martial arts, the crossing of this innovation border is what separates the black belt (which signifies master of the basics - not expert) from the true masters. Enough, Grasshopper. Let's move on.

One of the oldest and arguably the best air combat tactics is affectionately known by sim'ers as the "Boom And Zoom" (BnZ). As history records it, most acknowledge that "hit and run" team tactics, as they were known during the days of WWII, were developed by General Claire Chennault and the famous Flying Tigers during the early days of the war over the skies of China. To this day, the Flying Tigers 24.5:1 kill ratio has been unequaled – a testament to the effectiveness of the BnZ (and team tactics). So, just what exactly is a BnZ?

Boom and what?

The most basic description of the BnZ consists of a dive, a blast of gun fire as you close, followed by a high speed climb out of harm's way. While there is little opposition to what the term "zoom" refers to (the high speed extension), just exactly what "boom" refers to is another story. Some pilots say that it refers to the dive, while others insist that it refers to the actual attack, as in "BOOM!"

Breakin' it down

Regardless of how you label each section, the BnZ actually consists of four basic steps rather than three; dive, attack, extend, and a reversal. However, being the maverick I am, I believe there are five. I'll get to that later. The ideal BnZ goes something like this. You start from a position of superior altitude; dive on your target to gain speed; blast them with your guns as you close; enter a fairly steep climb to re-gain E; then turn around and do it all over again until the enemy is dead or you run out of ammo. While it seems simple enough, there are many things you need to consider to be an accomplished BnZ'er. In order to make it easier to understand, let's look at each step separately. However, before we begin, the first thing you always need to consider when flying prop combat is the E to danger ratio. It will dictate what you're able to do and how you can do it. "E" of course is energy, and danger is proximity, quantity, quality and E of your enemy. The more you have in your favor, the more likely it'll be for you to emerge victorious. We'll discuss more next time.

Until then, remember: there are no absolutes. ■

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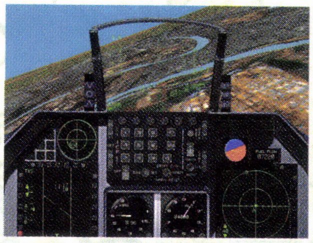

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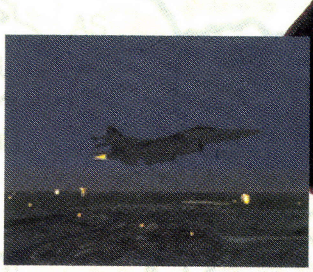

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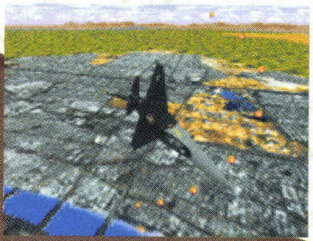

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Battlecruiser 3000 AD

Take 2 Interactive

DOS

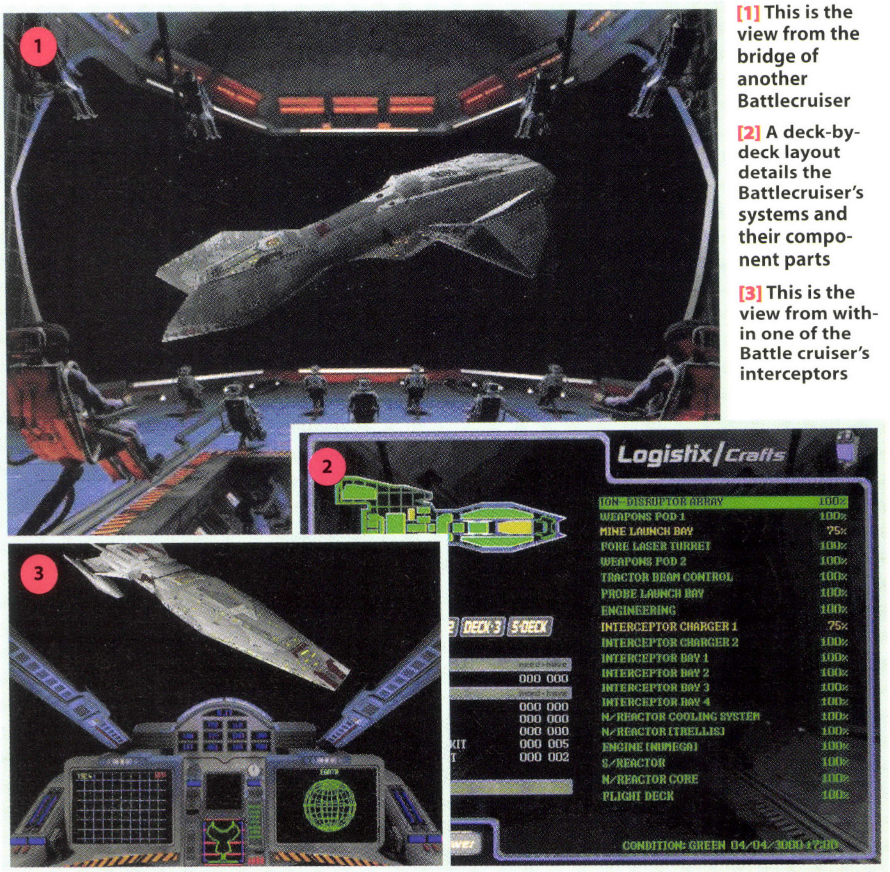
★☆☆☆☆

Here's a game with the highest "Huh?" Factor of any I have ever played. In case you're not familiar with "Huh?" Factor, this is the level of bafflement inherent in some games, the degree to which it won't do what it's supposed to do. It's proportional to the number of times you scratch your head or furrow your brow and utter any of the following syllables: "hmm…", "what!", or "huh?".

There are three causes of high "Huh?" Factor, and *Battlecruiser 3000 AD* is a textbook example of each one. The first cause is a bad manual. The black and white leaflet shipped with the game is incomplete, incorrect, and at times incoherent. It is rampant with stray tildes and umlauts, which is particularly odd, since it's not written in Spanish or German. The information presented is poorly organized and much of it is obviously wrong. I can unequivocally say that I have never seen worse documentation in a game. There is some online information and a walkthru file, but their shortcomings are overshadowed by the astonishing uselessness of the manual.

The second cause of "Huh?" Factor is a bad interface. An interface should be a buffer between a player and a game's complexity, not the obstacle course this game presents. Since almost all of its features are poorly documented, a lot of trial and error is necessary. Unfortunately, there is nothing intuitive about how the game works, so much of the trial and error will be in vain. There are scads of obscure acronyms and multi-key commands, many of which seem completely random. Navigation, support craft operations, personnel assignments, combat, and tactical displays are all hopelessly convoluted, and the manual is, of course, no help.

Finally, a broken game will lead to high "Huh?" factor. This one has more bugs than an Ozark camping trip. And I don't mean glitches, I mean full-fledged, bona fide, throw-your-hands-up-in-disgust, crash-your-computer-*hard* bugs that ultimately render the game unplayable. For instance, I defy anyone to load up a shuttle with an ATV, fill it with marines, go planetside, and then romp around with the troops. It is an integral part of the game, yet it *cannot be done*. Even the first mission of the campaign is broken and cannot be completed successfully. And if you thought Windows would protect you from DOS screens crammed with memory error messages and page fault info, you've got another thing coming.



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CONDITION: GREEN 04/04/3000 17:00

[1] This is the view from the bridge of another Battlecruiser

[2] A deck-by-deck layout details the Battlecruiser's systems and their component parts

[3] This is the view from within one of the Battle cruiser's interceptors

Although I wanted desperately to like this game, red flags starting popping up the moment I opened the box. Inside is a cardboard frame built to hold a jewel case, but the CD is tucked away in a little paper envelope. The registration card offers three choices for your type of computer: 386, 486, or other. A sticker on the back of the box reads, "Actual screen shots may vary," which perhaps accounts for why the pictures on the box look nothing like the actual game. Almost all facets of the game, from its marketing to its presentation to the actual program, indicate shoddy work, cut corners, and virtually no quality assurance. All signs point to a game that was not ready for release yet.

By far the saddest thing about this game is that it looks like there may be a good game trapped somewhere deep inside this mess. If the game worked properly, the player would be in charge of a capital spacecraft in the midst of a dynamic universe. An amazing spread of features are supposedly included in the game, ranging from a small fleet of support craft attached to the ship, a full roster of personnel with morale and fatigue factors, a long list of ship's parts for replacement or upgrade, a lively political set-up built around a dozen races at war, and a career structure which lets the player earn experience, medals, money, and promotions. Furthermore, the game's marketing boasts of a revolutionary neural net artificial intelligence.

Unfortunately, none of this is realized. Management of the Battlecruiser, when it works, is flat and dull, not to mention pointless, since the bigger picture is hopelessly muddled. This could have been the next step in the evolution of space combat games, bringing an unprecedented depth and complexity to the genre. But those of us hoping for an updated *Elite* or a more detailed *Privateer* have instead been saddled with what may very well be a worse debacle than Sierra's infamous *Outpost*. All I can say is, "Huh?"

* * *

Derek Smart's quixotic crusade to bring you the last thing you will ever desire is not quite over. After a seven year development period, Take 2 Interactive signed on to distribute his title, *Battlecruiser 3000 AD*. But somewhere along the way, something went horribly wrong. The exact details depend on who's telling the story, but the bottom line is that an unfinished piece of software was packaged and sold inside those silver boxes.

After a quickly contained spat on AOL, Mr. Smart and Take 2 have settled into a cordial, if somewhat icy, relationship. Both parties have said publicly they will continue to work on the game until it is finished. Take 2 has pledged to print whatever documentation Mr. Smart provides and to then distribute it to registered owners, free of charge. Mr. Smart, apparently hard at work on patches, has issued an online plea for help in putting together the new docs.

As this issue goes to press, three patches have been released, with a comprehensive overhaul still in the works. Thus far, none of the patches significantly reduces the game's "Huh?" factor. In fact, it seems that for every problem fixed, another is introduced. Mr. Smart claims that entire sections of the game written by Take 2 are broken and need to be replaced.

Although the final chapter of this game has yet to be written, it's reassuring to know there's an ongoing commitment to complete it. Who's to say whether Derek Smart is a visionary brought low by bean counters and corporate suits, or whether Take 2 is the brave company that took a chance with an unruly and eccentric developer? The truth is likely somewhere in between. But either way, at this point, the saga behind *Battlecruiser* is still far more interesting than the game itself. If significant developments should occur, we'll bring you the news. *–Tom Chick*

Archimedean Dynasty

Blue Byte Software

DOS, Win95

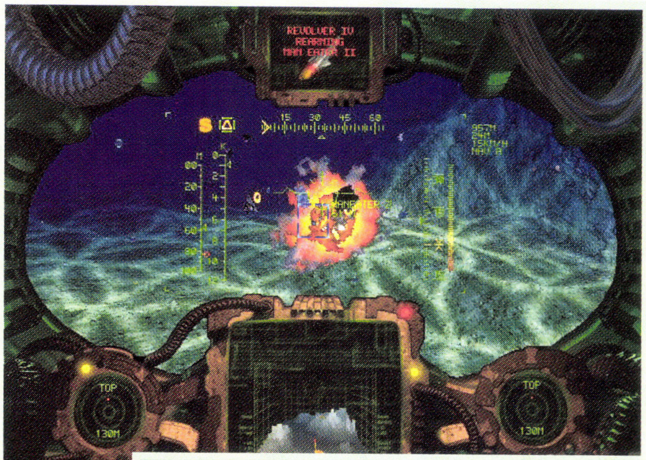
★★★★☆

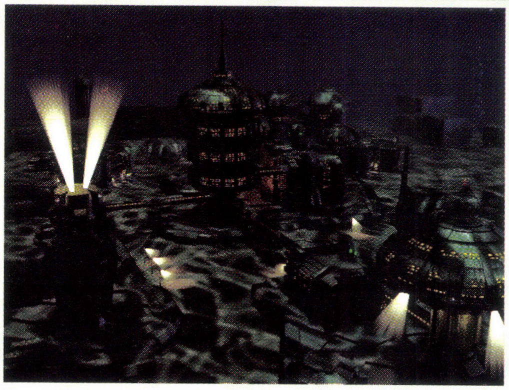
When you think submarines, if you know the history and technology, you think stealth. The meat and potatoes of any good sub sim should be an effective modeling of the various stealth techniques necessary to do good underwater combat. The most successful titles in this genre so far (*Aces of the Deep*, *Silent Hunter*) have been successful because they've given players the excitement of using sub-style tactics to sneak up unawares on the opponent. Not even the best of *Quake* or *Duke3D* can offer the thrill of having passed a massive convoy, undetected, to get into position to take on an opponent with the element of full surprise on your side. And there's nothing more hair-raising in computer gaming than having fired off a couple of torpedoes, suddenly revealing your position and now putting yourself in the position of needing to beat a faster retreat than your craft is really capable of beating.

Air combat sims have lost the thrill of this kind of combat lately; with the exception of some more recent helicopter sims, the general tendency in air combat has been to go in, guns and missiles a-blazing, get caught up in the firefight, then leave. Stealth hasn't been handled as well is it should be, given the emphasis on stealth technology for the next-generation aircraft most recent sims have been modeling.

Enter *Archimedean Dynasty*, with not only the prettiest graphics ever to grace an underwater sim, but also some of the most effective opportunities for underwater passive tactics ever to have appeared in a submarine simulation.

The first few missions are really warm-ups. They'll have you thinking of the *Wing Commander* series, or of *Subwar 2050* if you remember that title; they'll leave you with the impression that you're in a relatively simple shoot-'em-up game, which *looks* really good but plays the same. Watch out once you get into the meat of the game, though; now you'll have to do things like find a deep-sea current in an underwater rift, hide in it with your engines off, and drift past enemy gun turrets perched ominously atop ridges ahead of you right and left. Now you'll have to put together a cascading series of tasks for yourself as an underwater mercenary, with the constant need to determine whether you should follow the boss's priorities (and who's the boss? that changes over time), the needs of your own private smuggling concerns, the fulfillment of missions to prove your reliability to potential allies who could prove valuable down the line, and so on. Now you're playing *Archimedean Dynasty*.





Archimedean Dynasty

The part of the game which seemed most off-putting upon preview has thus turned out to be one of its most successful elements, and much more interesting than, again, first appearances would lead you to believe. The background story, which develops through a series of text conversations you have with the army of in-game characters, grows ever more complex and sophisticated the more you play. How you act in relationship to various characters determines what kinds of missions you'll be offered down the line, and sends you down what looks to be a pretty complex series of branchings while the game world unfolds. While at one level you may find yourself wondering why the designers chose to present this part of the game almost entirely in text (cut scenes offer periodic, hard-boiled dialogue, better scripted and voice-acted than that in most adventure games, by the way), soon you'll be happy they did. There's plenty of story to work through, it's interesting story, it features shades of gray, and if you have to replay sections of the game to change tactics during a combat mission, it's a lot more fun to click quickly through your previous conversation tree than it would be to wade through an endless series of cut-scenes yet again.

But the game wouldn't live on story alone; the fact is, the eerie, atmospheric underwater world Blue Byte and Massive have put together here is unique in gaming, with its brooding qualities and realistic underwater terrain and current features (the futuristic underwater cities are a blast to look at, too). Further, the combat between your craft and your opponents (significantly upgradeable over the course of the game) is much more sophisticated than usual; you'll have to spend time rethinking the turn-and-burn tactics you're used to in other kinds of simulation, and will have to develop subtler, more sophisticated strategies to get into the rhythms of the game. Veterans of previous sub sims will be in slightly more familiar waters here, though the futuristic angle to underwater combat changes the rules substantially from the days of WWII-Present. Things happen quickly in this game.

The only real negatives here are that the game's interface remains a bit alien for those used to the more common set of combat sim keystrokes; and, despite the included README, you're probably best off installing under Windows 95 (the game is ultimately DOS-based) than directly in DOS (weird keyboard and mouse lock-ups encountered in a pure DOS install were ended with re-installation under Windows). Otherwise, if you've been looking for a game featuring an epic story, a complex, involving gameworld, and the thrills of underwater stealth combat, you don't need to look much further than this game. *–Steve Wartofsky*

USNF '97

Jane's Combat Simulations

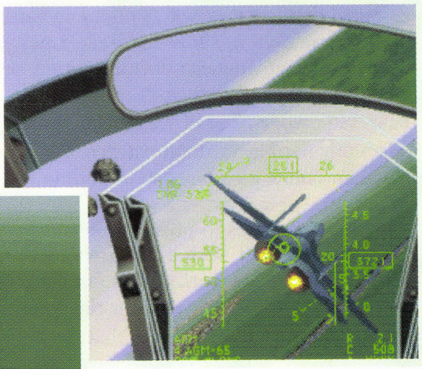
Windows 95

★★★☆☆

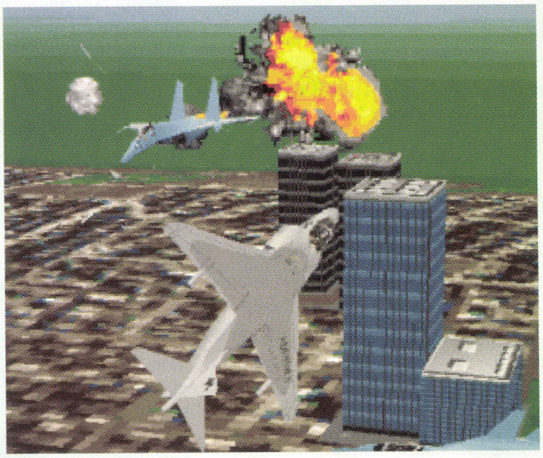
If you've played the original *US Navy Fighters* or its add-on *Marine Fighters*, you know the routine; in fact, with a few amendments, this is essentially a re-release of the originals, refitted for Windows 95. The main advantages of having this in a Win95 version are its semi-reliance upon DirectX (DirectPlay and DirectInput seem to be in use, taking sound card and joystick info from the Win95 DirectX drivers, but Direct3D – the one technology this game could most have benefited from – doesn't come into play at all), and the comparative ease of getting into and out of the game from the Win95 OS.

The other advantage of getting this updated version is that lots of little fixes, improvements and refinements have been added to the original design. While some of the nicest features of the *ATF/NATO Fighters* series never made it across here (the ability to fly any plane represented in the game, for instance, is absent), the addition of multiplayer – one of the main attractions of this whole series – will be significant to some. Aircraft graphic detail rivals the best offered in this series, with an option to turn "Best Textures" on for the utmost the designers can offer (on the aircraft; the terrain remains the sparse abstraction it's always been). The added Vietnam era aircraft, missions and campaign fills a technical gap in the series' coverage, bringing it closer to the scope of *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*. And, finally, the Jane's material here brings this addition in line with the rest of the series, filling out the reference material to put it on par with other Jane's-based games.

The best compliment to this conclusion of the engine Grace and Iverson have been driving since the release of the original *USNF* is that, at a time when everyone else seems to have lost the art of the paper manual, *USNF '97* comes with one which is thorough and well designed. The continuing value of having the Jane's affiliation is most apparent here, and bodes well for any future work (such as the team's upcoming sub simulation) they have planned. – *Steve Wartofsky*



USNF '97



AH-64 Longbow: Flash Point Korea

Jane's Combat Simulations

Windows 95

★★★★☆

Most add-on disks for games offer extra missions or scenarios, perhaps an editor of some sort, bug fixes, and minor upgrades. Consider this one instead a major overhaul of the original design, adding in an extra cockpit, new AI for the opposing units, a host of radar options, tweaking of the flight model, massive improvements in the granularity of the damage modeling (perhaps the most sophisticated in PC-based simulation right now) and inclusion of 140 new missions and a new campaign and theatre as well.

Add this disk to the original *Longbow* and you'll have one of the most sophisticated air combat simulations ever put together (as if the original weren't already there). There's little in the way of flight or combat you could imagine which isn't possible in one way or another with this addition; the instrument and radar control for detection and evasion are probably as close as anyone's ever going to get without dropping into a real Apache training program, and the AI for support units, both allied and opponent, has made a quantum leap in sophistication here.

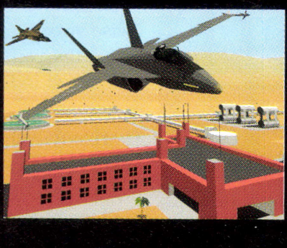
The only criticism would be that the Apache still seems just a *little* too easy to fly, even with all the realism settings maxed out; if there's anywhere to go along such lines, it would be towards pushing the software to the point where you'd really have to train to feel comfortable keeping the helicopter flying in a combat situation. As things stand, though, the balance keeps things fun even at the highest realism settings, which for most PC pilots is as it should be.

The Korean mission is a challenge, and should satisfy those who've worked their way through the previously included campaigns and missions too quickly to leave satisfied. Finally, practice handling the communications routines effectively during combat; you'll need to know them cold when this thing goes multi-player. – *Steve Wartofsky*

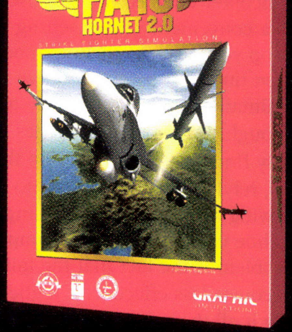
Flash Point Korea

REACH OUT AND TORCH SOMEONE.

F/A-18 HORNET



The hottest flight simulator game is now torching up your Windows® 95 PC. It's F/A-18 Hornet. With incredible 3-D graphics and realistic instrumentation, it'll push you to the outer limits then bring you screaming back to earth. In fact, F/A-18 Hornet closely simulates the Navy's own attack-fighter aircraft. There's 28 different Persian Gulf combat missions to test your skills — where you can blow up everything from ammunition depots using the M61 Vulcan cannon to MiG fighters with an AIM9 Sidewinder. So pick up the award winning F/A-18 Hornet today. It's the best way to get close to someone.



GRAPHIC
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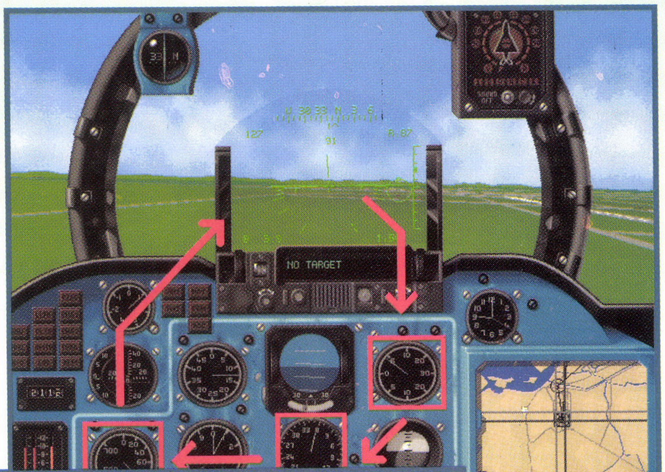
by Tom Chick

Hind

Flying lo-tech in a hi-tech world

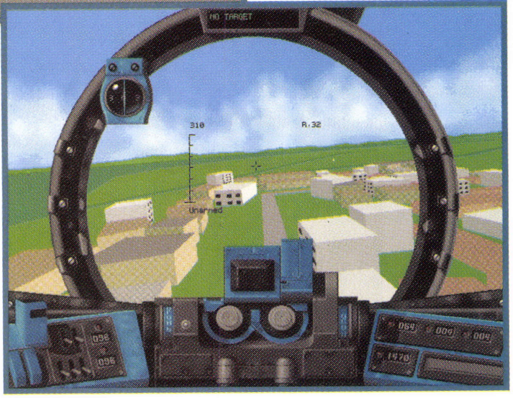
Hind is unique among helicopter sims in that it features a lower-tech aircraft than the Apache or Cobra. Its lack of fly-by-wire controls to make subtle adjustments will have you juggling the cyclic, collective, and tail rotor to keep the aircraft stable. Once you understand this extra burden on you as a pilot, you'll be able to practice with this in mind and hopefully complete your objectives in the campaign scenarios, where you won't have the benefit of the most tried and true flight sim technology to date: the "refly mission" option.

Hind's realistic flight model is described in the manual as "highly interactive" (think of this as a euphemism for "extremely difficult"). What this means is that each of the main controls (cyclic, collective, anti-torque rotor) interacts with the other. If you've flown other helicopter sims, you're probably comfortable with the interaction of cyclic and collective. But other sims tend to downplay the anti-torque rotor on the tail, mainly because they're modeling aircraft with fly-by-wire systems that automatically counter torque effects. Not so with the Hind. As you adjust the collective and alter the speed of the main rotor, the change in torque has a marked effect on the yaw of your fuselage, spinning you in directions you may not want to be spun. One of the most difficult things to learn in *Hind*'s realistic flight model is how to get that torque under control.



▲ Using the following scanning pattern across your analog gauges will free you up to fly with weapons armed. It'll also prepare you for HUD or navigation computer damage

◀ Don't forget to raise and lower your undercarriage! The drag it generates has a major effect on flight, and trying to land without it is possible, but not recommended



▼ Practicing flight, especially low altitude maneuvering, from the WSO's station will make combat situations a bit easier, where you may not have time to keep your eyes glued to the vertical velocity indicator

Do the twist, comrade

Dealing with *Hind*'s torque may involve unlearning habits from other sims. In most helicopter models, you can use the collective as a convenient way of setting your altitude. Drop your nose to pick up momentum and then tinker with the collective as needed to maintain level flight over the terrain. Easy enough. But anyone who tries this in *Hind* may find himself dancing on the rudder pedals, relying on the tail rotor to keep from yawing off course or fishtailing while trying to line up an attack run. Compounding the problem is the fact that the tail rotor becomes less effective at higher speeds, making it all the more difficult to counteract unwanted torque.

The best way to counter torque effects is to not generate them in the first place. Whereas you might normally use the collective to chase the *altitude* you want, in Hind you should chase your *collective*. Find the best setting for a given situation and leave the collective there, using the cyclic to maintain altitude. Generally speaking, you'll want the collective at about 80% to cruise at 300kph, but this will vary with weight (75% for a completely empty Hind, as opposed to 85% for a fully-loaded Hind). In combat situations, chasing the collective is less important if you're evading enemy fire, where the odd yaw and occasional jink is a good thing. But if you're trying to line up a bomb run or a rocket shot, do everything you can to keep from fiddling with the collective.

Hind sight

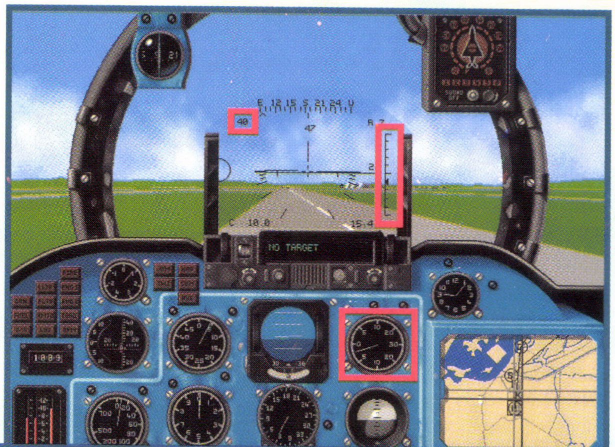
Another habit to shake when flying the Hind is the tendency to keep your eyes locked on the HUD. The navigation mode has a handy vertical velocity indicator on the right side which is perfect for making sure you're not about to plow into the ground or balloon upwards. The waypoint caret and flight path marker are also easy ways to make sure you're on course. Unfortunately, when you've got a weapon armed, or when you're in the WSO's seat, not all of these convenient displays are available. They're also gone when your navigation computer or HUD is damaged. So it's important to be able to fly without relying on them. Instead, learn to use the analog gauges in the cockpit. Real-world pilots use a scanning pattern every so often as a way of keeping track of the gauges. A quick, clockwise sweep from the vertical speed indicator to the horizontal situation indicator to the radar altimeter is an important habit to cultivate. This will also free you up to cruise with R60's or Shturms armed.

Stopping on a ruble

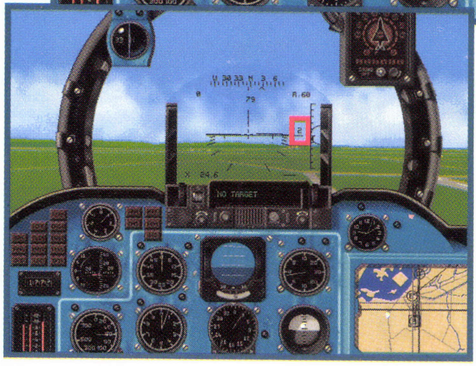
The perfect ending to a perfect mission is a perfect landing. But with this "highly interactive" flight model, that's easier said than done. In most other helicopter sims, you simply slow to a hover over your landing site and ease up on the collective until your tires kiss the ground. But with *Hind*, slowing down to a hover is hard enough; as you ease up on the collective, you end up yawing to one side, and suddenly you're moving in a different direction. Instead, drop your speed to about 100 knots as you approach the landing site. Execute a 180 degree turn as you pass over it to bring the helicopter to almost a complete halt. With a little practice, this becomes the easiest way to counter forward momentum without doing the rudder pedal dance. Note as well that the main rotor isn't perfectly perpendicular to the fuselage; it's titled slightly forward. If the Hind's nose is completely level (angle of pitch = zero degrees), it will naturally gather a bit of forward velocity. To hover, try holding the nose up a degree or two.

Alternatively, the Hind is perfectly capable of landing like an airplane. With one engine out, this is in fact the only way to land, as a single engine can't generate enough lift to sustain a hover. Keep your speed down around 50kph and ride the collective down gently, being careful not to pick up any lateral speed as you compensate for torque effects. And don't forget to turn off the wheel brakes before you touch down; they automatically engage when you drop the undercarriage. If you can land this way, you'll also be able to perform autorotations, which are a must if you're going to fly the campaign missions. Unfortunately, there's no way to disengage the rotors and practice (the manual claims – falsely – that there's an autorotation training mission). Instead, you can take off and push the engine into overtorque. After about 35 seconds, the first engine will give out. 15 seconds later, the second engine will die and *voila!*, instant autorotation practice!

Eventually, flight in the realistic mode becomes pretty intuitive. And the Hind isn't the nimblest of aircraft, so dramatic changes in altitude are rare. This makes low level flight – crucial for any combat situation – relatively safe, once you're comfortable with the flight model. You'll be thankful for this, as the conversion to combat situations is a whole other can of worms. We'll open that can in a subsequent article. ■



▲ This speed and descent rate will allow for a successful rolling landing. Don't forget to switch off the wheel brake



◀ Keeping the nose up a degree or two with the angle of pitch readout on the HUD will make hovering easier

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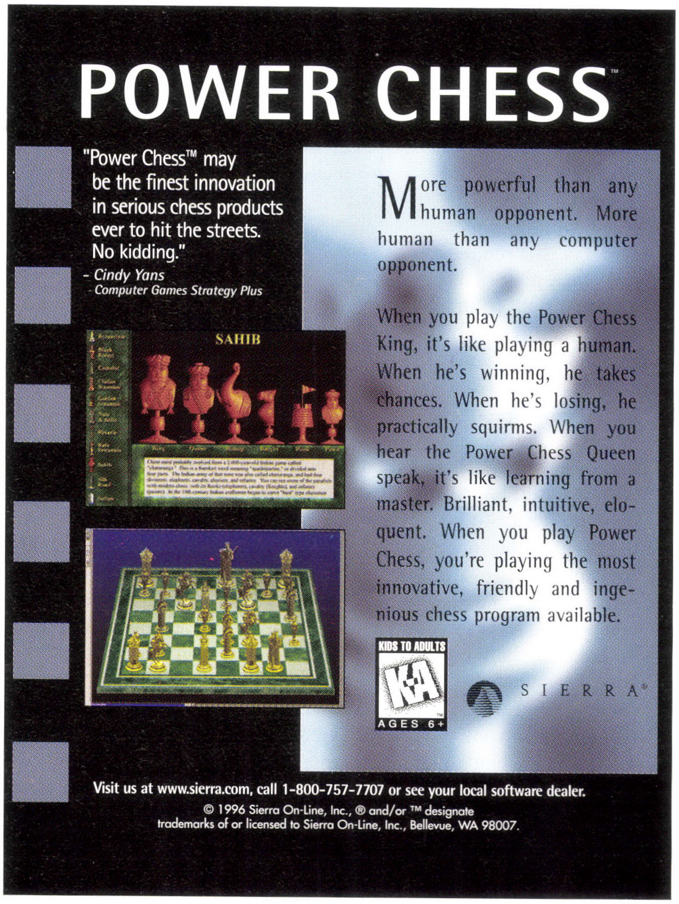
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The ball stops here

Review

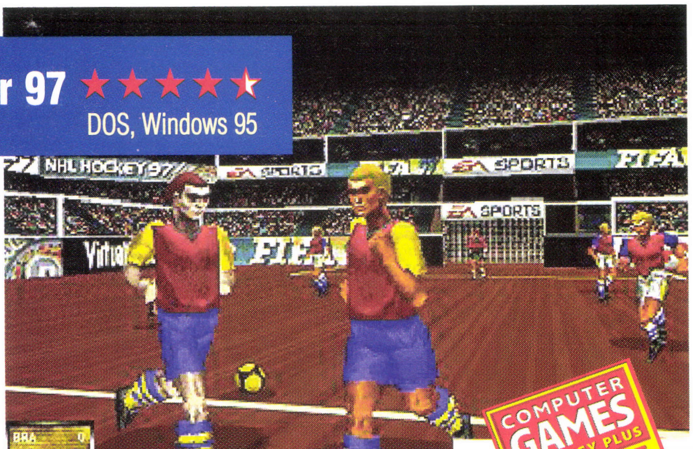
FIFA Soccer 97 ★★★★½

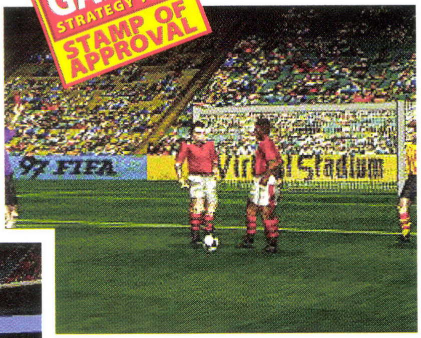
EA Sports

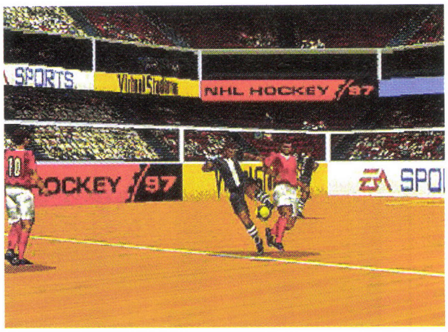
DOS, Windows 95

Quickly, name a sport that hasn't been simulated by Electronic Arts. Okay, sure there's a bunch, but Ballroom Dancing and Bowling For Hairpieces [*how about Strip Bowling? -ed*] don't really count. The truth is that EA has dabbled in just about every major sport there is in recent years, but perhaps none as successfully as soccer.

The latest release in the respected *FIFA* soccer line not only continues in the tradition of its forerunners, but betters it. In short, it's one heck of a beautiful game, and most probably the best thing EA Sports has ever turned out.







▲ These guys may look a bit funky in a screen shot like this, but once they're in motion they look superb ▶ Dribbling has received a major realism boost ▼ Indoor soccer provides for a more action-oriented game

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

FIFA 97 is a serious soccer game for serious players. Stealing from their own *NHL Hockey 97*, it gives us a "virtual" look at the game, with multiple cameras, 3-D rendered polygonal players that look just right from all angles, and certainly all the flash we've come to expect from an EA Sports product.

In case you're waiting for a "but…", there isn't one. Why? Well, all those wild EA cameras that most often don't do justice to hockey gameplay really do the trick on the soccer pitch. Aside from one particularly in-close angle that is best reserved for the magnificent *FIFA* replay component, each serves a particular purpose. You may actually find yourself doing exactly what EA intended when this whole multiple camera thing was first implemented, namely toggling from view to view *during* the game. Ah, it's nice when a plan comes together.

But, unlike *NHL 97*, the *FIFA 97* designers haven't forgotten what makes a game a good game. And that, mates, is authentic play. There's been a number of obvious tweaks to the *FIFA 96* AI engine in the latest product, and each has gone to improve what was already the best soccer game out there.

Most noticeably, gameplay speed has been slowed and ball physics deadened to more accurately reflect real life. That means no more hyper-speed runs and no more gravity-defying shots, but if you want that, there's always *VR Soccer 96* and *Striker 96*. You can also forget about turning your ball-handlers "on a dime." They just don't play dat no mo, so now you'll have to run them through the turns.

Nor do they keep the ball magically glued to their feet. Now they dribble like real players - tapping it forward, catching up to it, then doing it all again. This leaves more room for tackles and interceptions, but that's the way it should be. In a defensive posture, you'll find attackers acting and reacting to your mere positioning, so it won't always be a teeth-jarring tackle that ends a given foray. Again, another step toward total authenticity.

But not everything has been rehashed, and for the most part that's a good thing. On-field coaching looks a bit different, but is just as strong as ever with strategies and formations that really do have an effect on overall team tendencies. If you're lucky enough to have a gamepad with six or more buttons, you'll continue to have access to dozens of basic and complex player actions. And yes, John Motson's play-by-play and other on-field audio remains pleasantly above par.

As is the norm with EA Sports games, there are a gaggle of user definable options such as environmental conditions (random, drenched, damp, hot and dry), menuing language (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish) and foul format (fouls on, fouls off, fouls with no cards). There's plenty more including player trades (or transfers to you Brits), practice sessions, modem/network support and even an indoor format that may be tonic for the impatient, but feels much more cramped than the *Striker '96* indoor game.

As with most EA Sports products, however, user satisfaction often seems to vary with each particular computing set-up. On a Pentium 90 with sixteen megabytes of RAM, a Matrox Mystique video card and a run of the mill SoundBlaster 16, nary a glitch was encountered. If beta testing was better than that of *NHL 97*, you'll have the same good fortune [*of course with this being PC-land, your mileage may vary. -ed*].

Currently, EA Sports is buckled in recreating its soccer experience for a new and supposedly wondrous game that'll see the light of day sometime in late 1997. Which leaves you with one question; why wait? *FIFA 97* is here today. *–Gordon Goble*

Review

NFL Quarterback Club 97

Acclaim DOS ★★★½☆

It's appropriate Miami Dolphins Quarterback Dan Marino graces the box of Acclaim's *NFL Quarterback Club 97;* while he's one of the greatest quarterbacks of all-time, and still a good passer, he's not the best in the league today. The same can be said of this game; *Quarterback Club* is fun to play and nice to look at, but has a few bugs and lacks certain options PC football gamers expect in a new gridiron game.

There is no career mode, as in the *Front Page Sports* line of football games; there are no accumulated stats or General Manager options; and the graphics are nice, but may not appeal to everyone. Still, this game has enough action and those "little things" which make it fun to play.

The game greets you with an impressive opening video and then introduces you to the stars of the game: the members of the NFL's "Quarterback Club." Pick your favorite QB and jump right into the game, because action is what it's all about. But choose your QB carefully because you'll be using him a lot in this game. Running the ball is fun, but passing is how you'll win.

One word of caution before you start dropping back in the pocket: study the joystick/keyboard commands carefully. They take a bit of time to get used to, and with a four-button gamepad they can be downright confusing. Also, if you're having trouble judging the timing of kickoffs and field goals, set your screen resolution to about 320X200 to get a clearer look at the power meter.

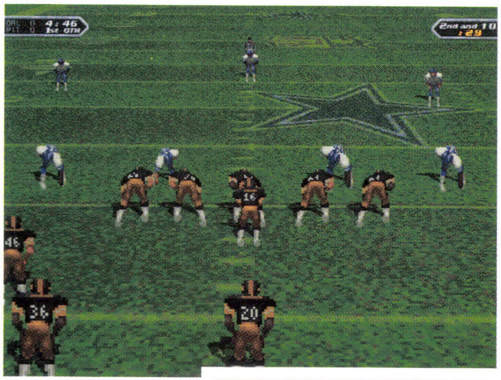
After you've chosen your game options – quarter length, skill level, stadium (of which there are only four generic types) – you're given the option of picking which Club member you want to play for your team (preseason mode only). This is a nice feature for those what-if scenarios, and one of the many nice extras that this game offers (you can also trade players to build your own Dream-Team).

A nicely done (close your eyes and you'll swear the game is on the tube) coin-toss follows your pre-game selections and then it's on to the action. As the ball is kicked off you'll immediately notice the great-looking graphics and some of the "extras" mentioned before. There are team logos on the field, and in the end-zone for each individual stadium are some cool looking banners. In Green Bay, for instance, one banner reads "Cheddar Heads Rule!"

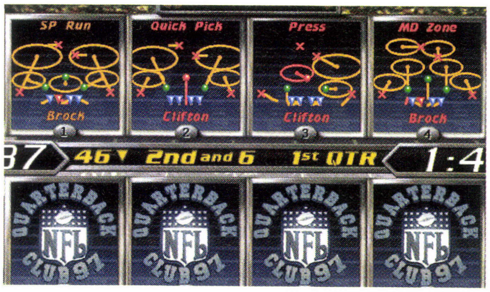
Unfortunately, it's at the kickoff you'll also notice one of the annoying features of this game. When the receiving team catches the ball (or after any change of possession) the field spins 180°. This is very disorienting and can lead to a yardage loss if you're not aware. During gameplay though, you choose or create your own views; unfortunately, you can't save these views from game to game, and if your game goes into overtime, the views reset as if you're playing a new game again. A patch to fix this problem and another bug that didn't let you use your edited rosters in season games should be available by the time you read this.

Quarterback Club tries to make up for its faults by attacking your senses with some little things other games may lack, and with great on-field action. The little things include the previously mentioned stadium banners, the player taunts ("I'm gonna rip you a new one!") and celebrations (Go Keyshawn!), and the individual "special" plays for each QB (check out Drew Bledsoe's "Drew Blood" and Marino's "Dan D Man"). There are also hidden codes, teams, and player celebrations (for the hidden codes check out Acclaim's website, **www.acclaim.com**; for the teams and celebrations, you're on your own).

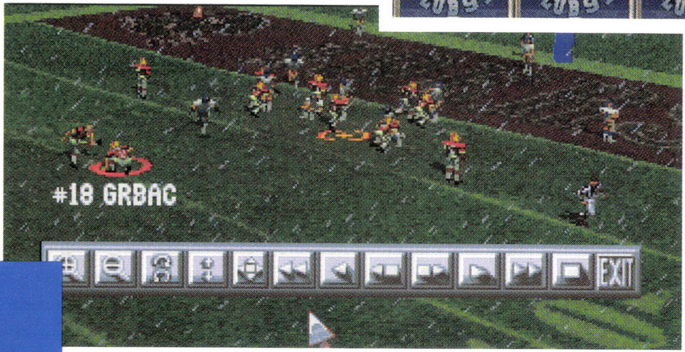
The game action is fast and furious and pretty realistic (although Barry Sanders seems a bit too unstoppable) and if you prefer arcade fun to a stat-heavy simulation, this game is for you. So strap on your helmet, grab your gamepad, and join the Club: the *NFL Quarterback Club 97*. *–Dan Olawski*



▲ The on-field player graphics are not the game's strongest feature



▶ The game offers more than 800 plays



▼ Set the screen resolution lower to get a better look at the kicking meter

Review

Striker '96 ★★⯪☆☆

Acclaim

DOS

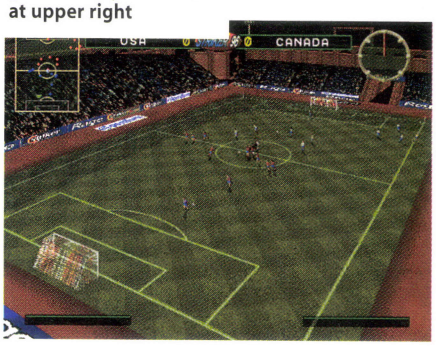
Soccer is a game of finesse, of gentle "touches" and deft footwork, pinpoint passing and incredible timing. It's also a game of scorching drives, maniacal runs, and overwhelming speed. With *Striker '96*, Acclaim has certainly replicated the power and speed of the sport, sacrificing a little strategy and realism in the process.

That's not to say *Striker* doesn't have the framework of a great game. Actually, with loads of options and settings, a ball control system which permits most any form of shot or pass, and enough gloss to make any EA Sports programmer proud, it looks to have all the bases covered. It's just that when you start playing the thing, all the stuff which makes soccer *soccer* gets eaten up in an orgy of speed and rapid button clicking.

Striker gives you the chance to pit one of forty hypothetical national soccer "sides" in exhibition, league or tournament play against the best (or worst) the world has to offer. Choose your team wisely, because some teams field better make-believe lineups than others, and player trades are not permitted. The software also features multiplayer and network gaming, and what would appear to be a very cool "simulation" vs. "arcade" mode which unfortunately doesn't have enough impact to make its inclusion worthwhile.

Then there's the little matter of "Game Duration," a seemingly innocuous preference setting that normally wouldn't even rate a mention. Here it does, however, and a prominent one at that, for the simple fact that no game, at any time, can exceed a *ten minute* time frame. That goes a trifle beyond the dictionary definition of ridiculous and well into the world of bizarre. Ten minutes? Geez, the idea *is* to sell games, isn't it?

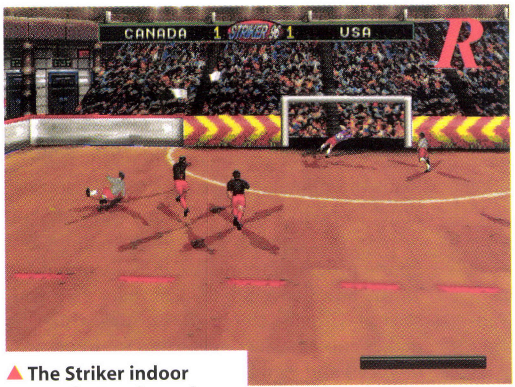
▼ North American rivals Canada and USA prepare for kick-off at the generic Striker stadium. Note the field "scanner" at upper left and game clock (which goes w-a-a-y too fast) at upper right



Nevertheless, once you've realized your game's gonna be briefer than the sexual activities of a typical porcupine, you'll still want to take this babe for a roll in the hay. Just keep an eye on the *but*.

For example, yes, it has seven distinct

floating cameras, *but* only one of them is really satisfactory. Yes, it has a replay, *but* it's automatic, with no manual controls or a save feature. Yes, it has an announcer, *but* his commentary is either totally absurd or masked by irritating and repetitive crowd effects. And finally, although it comes with an absolute ton of player actions and pass/shot making variety, *Striker*'s game speed is just too fast to accommodate anything but crunching tackles and straight-ahead blasts.



▲ The Striker indoor game - fast and unruly. Here, the Canadian goalkeeper thwarts a rocketing Yankee blast

Graphically, the game is pretty good. Player animations, rendered as sprites rather than the more modern polygons, are smooth, and somewhat 3D. Crowds are beautifully rendered, and billboards rotate to reveal new signage underneath. An analog clock sits in the top right of the screen and a "scanner" in the top left, giving an overhead full field view with the current positions of all players. As was said earlier, the framework for a great game is here, *but*...

Playing *Striker* is kinda like playing a hockey game on grass (the kickin', not the smokin' kind). It's not that it isn't fun – it *is,* in the short term, anyway – but when compared to products like EA's *FIFA* series, some of that soccer quality is definitely missing. Particularly at "Medium" and "Hard" settings, the damn game just flies by, with no real chance or need to make use of the complex ball handling techniques provided to four and six button gamepadders.

Yet all this fast action does have its place. It offers the opportunity to play *indoor* soccer as well as the outdoor variety, and here, the game plays better than some hockey games. Again, there's not a whole lot of strategy required, and very few options are supplied, but for arcade action, a ball that never goes out of play, and players that refuse to become fatigued, it's a hoot.

For a quick soccer experience bearing little resemblance to the real thing, *Striker '96* is the answer. But when games like *FIFA 97* are out there, it's hard to offer much of a recommendation for this one. *–Gordon Goble*

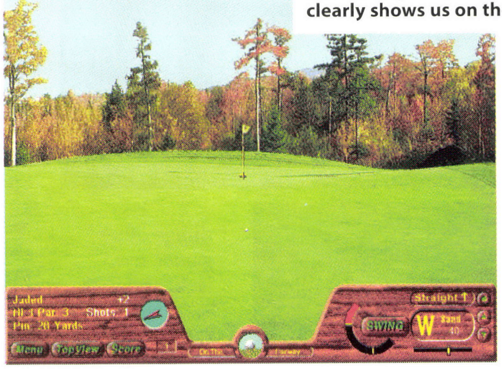
Review

Picture Perfect Golf: Sugarloaf

Lyriq Windows ★★☆☆☆

Picture Perfect Golf: Sugarloaf (*Harbortown* comes bundled with the club) is quite pretty (all graphics are of the course with fall colors in their full splendor) but nothing to get too excited about. As the name would suggest, the course is created from a series of photos. It looks nice enough, but you're bound to land the ball "between photos." So after the game reports a shot as landing in the rough, you may still be hitting from what appears to be the fairway. The one interesting feature this golf game brings to the table is a slider for swing strength. Each club has a range of potential distances. If you crank it up to the max, the swing meter moves very quickly. If you cut it down to the minimum, it moves at a sedate pace. For once, hitting a long club softly is easier than crushing it with a shorter club.

The *Picture Perfect Golf Virtual Reality System* is a hardware device consisting of a sensor containing base unit the connects to a serial port on your PC, and a 26" "golf club" that emits a beam of light. When you swing the club, the light beam passes over the sensors and the gizmo registers it as a ball being hit. And, surprisingly, it works.



▼ If you can make it out, the message at the bottom says "On the fairway" but the picture clearly shows us on the green

Does it feel like a real club? Not really. The head is weighted so that the unit has about the same mass as a real club, but since it is all in one big lump at the end of the shaft, it's really hard to swing smoothly. You may find that you'll jerk your swing at the bottom of its arc. Sure, you could probably learn to compensate, but what's that going to do to your real game?

The *VRS* also doesn't model reality very well. If, for example, you're cursed with a wicked slice, it should show up with the *VRS*. It doesn't. In fact, the courses are actually easier with the club than with the mouse.

Will this device improve your golf game? Certainly not. Will you have some fun with it? Probably. If you buy your holiday gifts out of Hammacher-Schlemmer catalogs, then go for it. It'll be loads of fun on Christmas Day when family and friends come to visit, but mostly likely will be stashed in the cellar with the plastic Santa statue soon thereafter.

As to the stand alone *Sugarloaf,* buy *Links* (*LS* or *386*, depending on your hardware) instead. *–Peter Smith*

Review

NCAA Championship Basketball

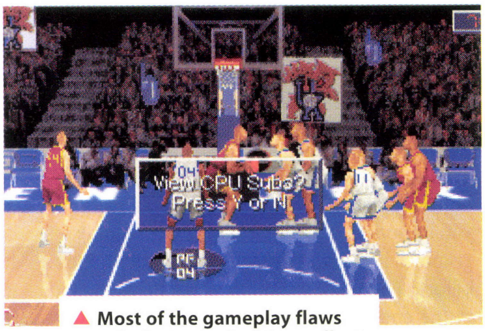
GTE Entertainment DOS ★★★☆☆

I reviewed *NCAA Championship Basketball* last month, giving it a low two-star rating. After discovering that some of my criticisms were outright wrong, I've decided to re-rate the game.

When referring to the recruitment mode of the game, I erroneously reported that you could only recruit teams one season at a time. It's implemented a bit on the clunky side – you have to save, quit the current season, go back to the main menu and start a new season – but the feature does exist. Because I (still) feel that this feature, as it's implemented, turns an average basketball game into a excellent simulation of college hoops, I've increased my rating of the game.

Just as software occasionally gets released ahead of its time, so can reviews. Had there been an extra week to spend with the game, perhaps this would not have happened. The feature wasn't well documented, but it did exist, and to criticize the game for it not being there was wrong. It's not an excuse – factual errors such as this should not occur. For this, we apologize to GTE Entertainment and all of the people who worked on this project.

In the end, rather than being an underachiever (as the original review called it), *NCAA Championship Basketball* could more accurately be described as an unpolished gem of a game. It's a bit rough around the edges, but if you get beyond the surface, you'll find a pretty slick basketball simulation, one which provides more depth than either *NBA Live 96* or *NBA Full Court Press*. *–Steve Bauman*



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▲ Most of the gameplay flaws remain, but as a sim it's excellent

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Diablo Mania

I recently purchased your November issue, #72, and was pleased to find a *Diablo* demo inside. I have been waiting for this game to hit the shelves, and the sample was a godsend to people like myself. It was a taste of action that actually left me with a feeling of sadness. Actually, the truth of the matter is, I was genuinely *depressed*! You might ask why the game I was so anxiously anticipating would inspire such a response. The answer is quite simple. I realized after playing the game in demo format that not only did I crave the complete version, but that I'd be so addicted to it I wouldn't have a social life any longer! *[this wouldn't bother* real *gamers… – ed.]* I love the game! Its fluid game play and sheer beauty are testaments to Blizzard's dedication and understanding of what makes for fun gaming. My depression was relieved only by the assurance that in about a year or so, when I've exhausted all desire to play *Diablo*, I'll be able to leave the house and resume with my life. All joking aside, the game promises to be a gem in the industry, and as id's *Doom* made its mark, so will Blizzard's *Diablo*. Thanks for the peek, and for a great magazine!

Joe Criscuolo
via the Internet

You're welcome, Joe. Don't worry about your social life; just enjoy the game, you'll certainly be in lots of company there! – ed.

With friends like these…

I have some stuff to say about *Quake*, but I just wanted to say that your magazine rocks! I am new to your magazine and just bought an October '96 copy of it and I like the CD-ROM and previews and other info it has to offer; your magazine beats the other magazines cold! But, about *Quake:* I think *Quake* has the most realistic 3D environment out there! It has light shading, actual 3D players and enemies instead of 2D players like in *Doom* and *Duke3D*. It also has the most realistic textures, and the liquid effects in *Quake* are awesome! I like it when you go underwater and into the lava, heh! But, I think *Duke3D* in a way is more fun than *Quake*. In *Duke3D* there are more things to do, like blow up walls, use more weapons (real cool weapons!), etc. Multi-player in *Duke3D* is way more fun than *Quake*, and *Duke3D* has more realistic environments; for example, it has posters on the wall, toilets, vents, subways, moving vehicles (like the subway), etc. The point is that *Quake* could have been better. But, I love *Quake* and *Duke3D* both. I kinda rank *Quake* and *Duke3D* as a tie because they both have special features. And!!! I cant wait for the plutonium pak add-on for *Duke3D*!!! I heard there is an advancement to the new shrink ray that turns it into a microwaver, and you can turn your enemies into toast with it!! Check it out at (**www.3drealms.com/atomic.html**).

Carl Iverson, Jr.
Via the Internet

Thanks for the advice, Carl! – ed.

Word on SSI

Do you have any information on *Panzer General 2* or other projects from SSI? Are there any recent CGSP issues with any info on *PG2* and other SSI software? Keep up the great work with the magazine. Thanks.

Peter Byun
via the Internet

This issue features everything we know and are allowed to disclose on SSI's upcoming titles. – ed.

The Kids are Alright

Hello! I am a major fan of your magazine, of course. But instead of the average fan mail you usually receive, I am writing to ask about what I think would be a really awesome career. The jobs are as follows: a game editor for a magazine or a game tester (such as Tom Chick or Robert Mayer in your magazine). Along with any available info you have, I would like a letter from people holding the jobs listed above describing the jobs, please!!!!

Shane Campbell, 9th grader
Milton, FL

I live for computers, and I'll probably work for a game company or magazine. The games I have right now are: *Hexen*, *System Shock*, *Dark Forces*, *Duke Nukem 3D*, *NBA Live 95*, *SimCity 2000* and *BioForge*. I'm hoping I'll get Windows 95 in a little while. I sent you this letter because I was hoping you could fix me up as a game tester. I'll work for free!!! I'm counting on you to help me out here. I'm 11 years old and thank you for your time.

Matthew Riechmann
Santa Ana, CA

Shane and Matt: first, recognize that outside beta testers do not get paid to do the work they do; at best, they'll get a complimentary free copy of the game when it's finished. That being said, if you're willing to go through the trouble of testing a game which will crash frequently (at first), might lock up or mess up your OS, which you'll have to play under time pressure to get to the parts which need work and which you'll need to report in detail on, the best thing to do is to find lists of software companies and their phone numbers, call them up, and ask what opportunities they might have. Companies are always looking for help in these areas, and many of them spend time conducting focus groups as well (another avenue for an early look at and early input on a game). Good luck! It can be as much fun doing the cooking as it is eating the meal! – ed.

DOS y Doh!

I was wondering if it is possible to start up a computer so that it boots up in either Windows 95 or DOS. With Windows 3.1 it was easy to do, but with Windows 95 being an operating system of its own, I'm not sure what to do. The reason I want this is that I find a lot of games run much better through DOS than through Windows 95.

Darryl Vleeming
Edmonton, Alberta

Darryl, simple solution here: hit <F8> when you see the "Starting Windows" message, and you'll have a choice to get "Command Prompt Only." This will get you into DOS 7.0 without any Windows 95 overhead. Only catch here is that you may need to create a multi-config AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS so that you can load real mode CD-ROM and mouse drivers, as well as hard drive cache, in pure DOS mode. Most games come with boot disk instructions which will get you started along such lines; we don't have the room here to offer a fuller explanation on how to accomplish this. – ed.

High praise indeed

I saw one of your postings on a newsgroup and it prompted me to finally send off an e-mail to you. I just wanted to tell you that I think you have the finest computer gaming magazine available. I have subscribed for several years now, and although the magazine's look has changed, the reviews have remained uniformly high in quality. I am particularly pleased with the treatment you provide for strategy games. I love strategy games, and your magazine provides enough information and perspective to actually assist me in the buying process. Since grognards are, by their very nature, idiosyncratic, this is no small feat. Too many magazines rely on providing a star rating and a quick textual gloss, something that is less than useless when trying to tell if you're going to like a particular implementation of Napoleonics. With CGSP that is never a problem. Thank you, and keep up the good work. By the way, I couldn't care less about flight sims, but I do still enjoy reading the reviews. Mr. Wartofsky and the other flight sim nuts often bring up interesting issues and points related to simulations in general and flying in particular that are fun to read even when I am uninterested in the product.

Allan Shampine

Thanks, Allan! As sims and strategy games draw closer together (our prediction), the concerns of each audience will overlap more and more; we hope our writing on both sides will take this advance into account intelligently, and address the concerns of fans of both genres effectively. – ed.

Produced in U.S.A.
Computer Games Strategy Plus (USPS 008-423) is published monthly by Strategy Plus, Inc. Periodical postage paid at Rochester, VT 05767 and additional mailing offices.
Postmaster: Send address changes to Strategy Plus, Inc., PO Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-9283. Fax: 201.627.5872

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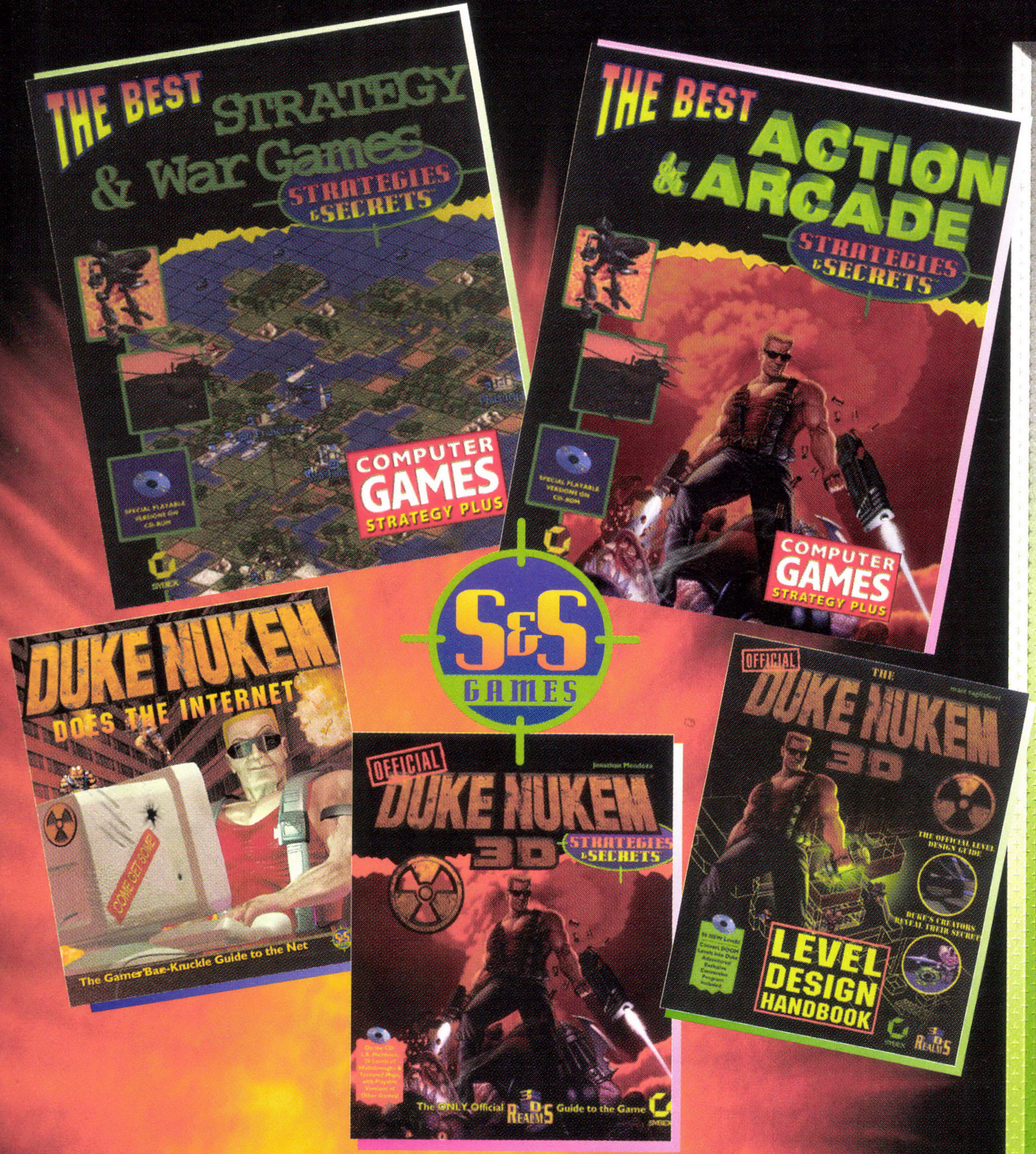
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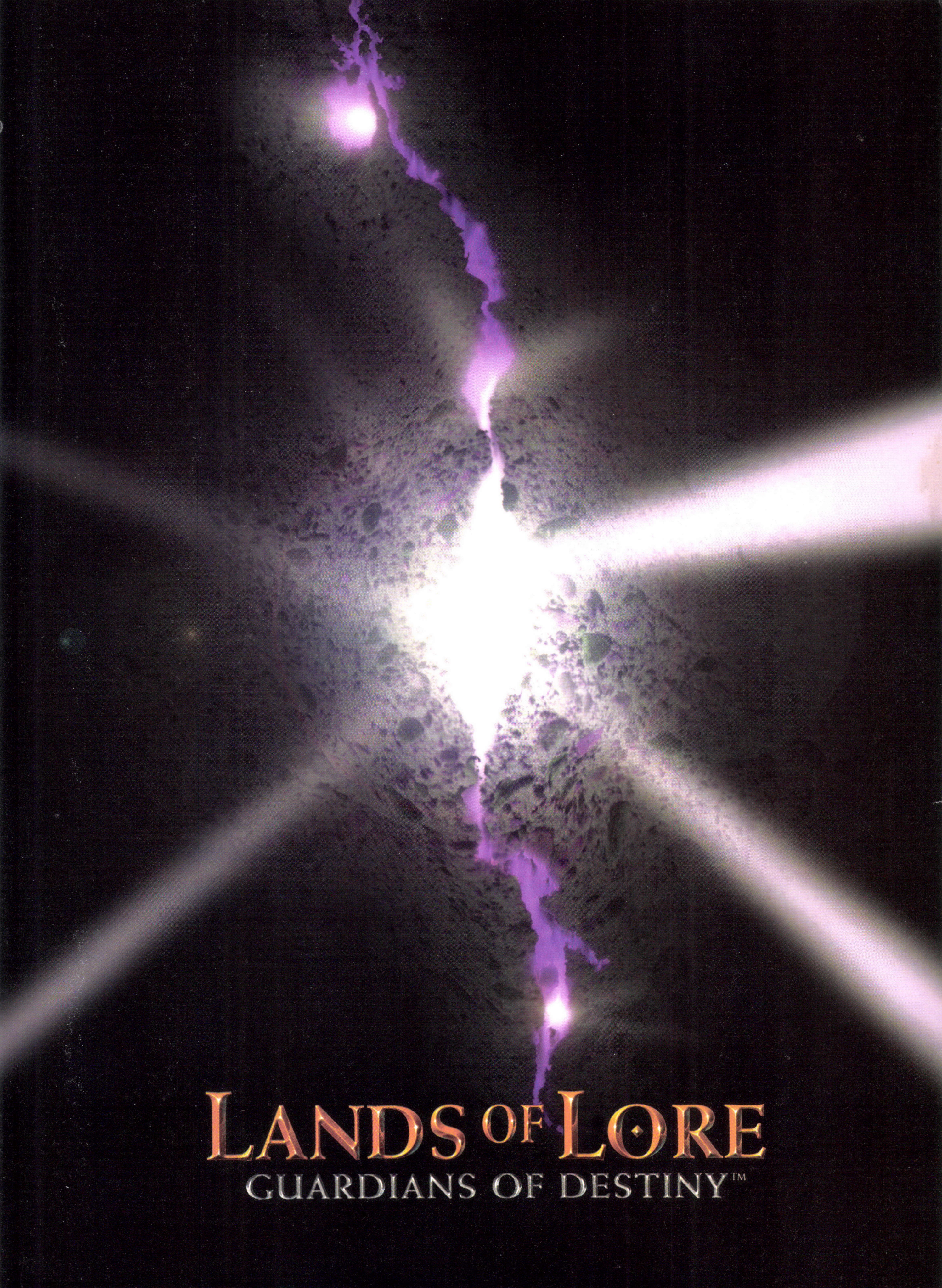

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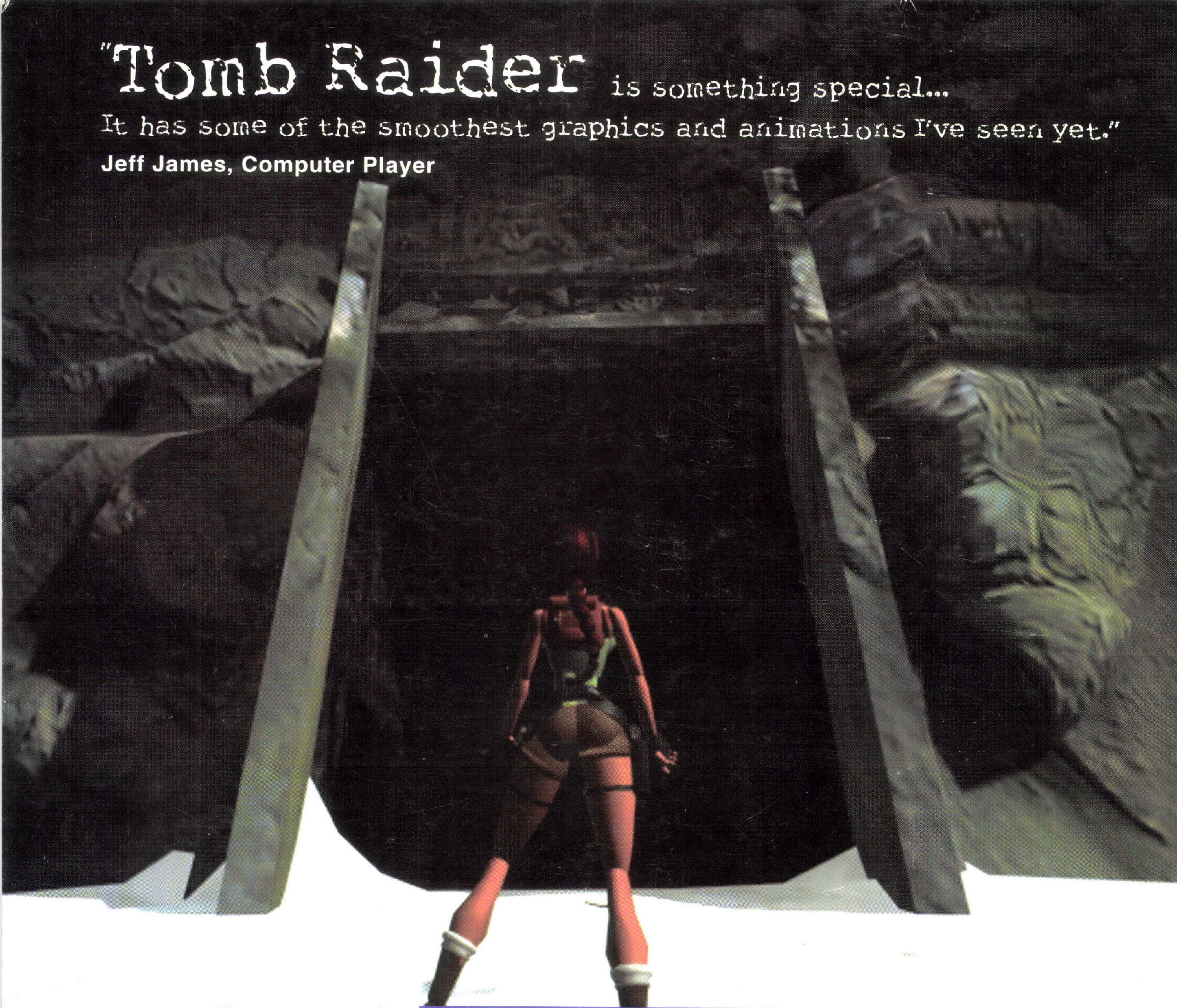

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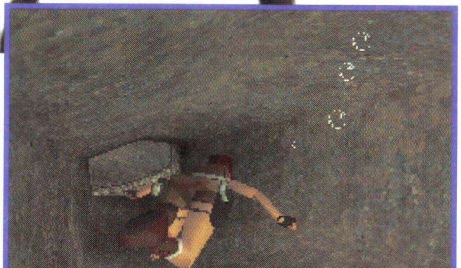

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